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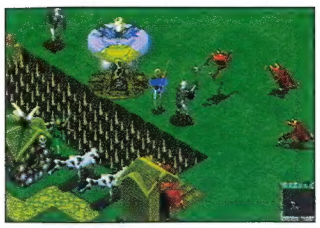
Clearly, something has startled Mr. Cow, And it Ain't a Pair of Cold Hands.



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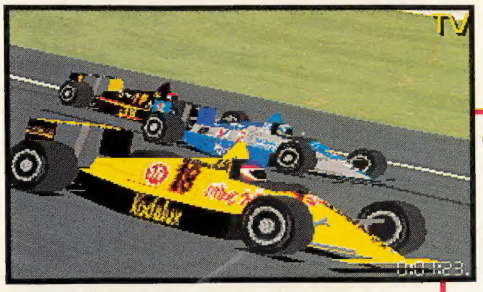

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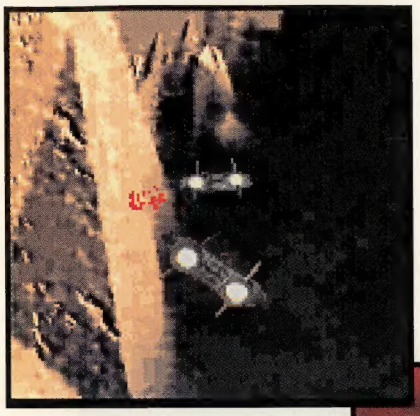
The Best Of 1993



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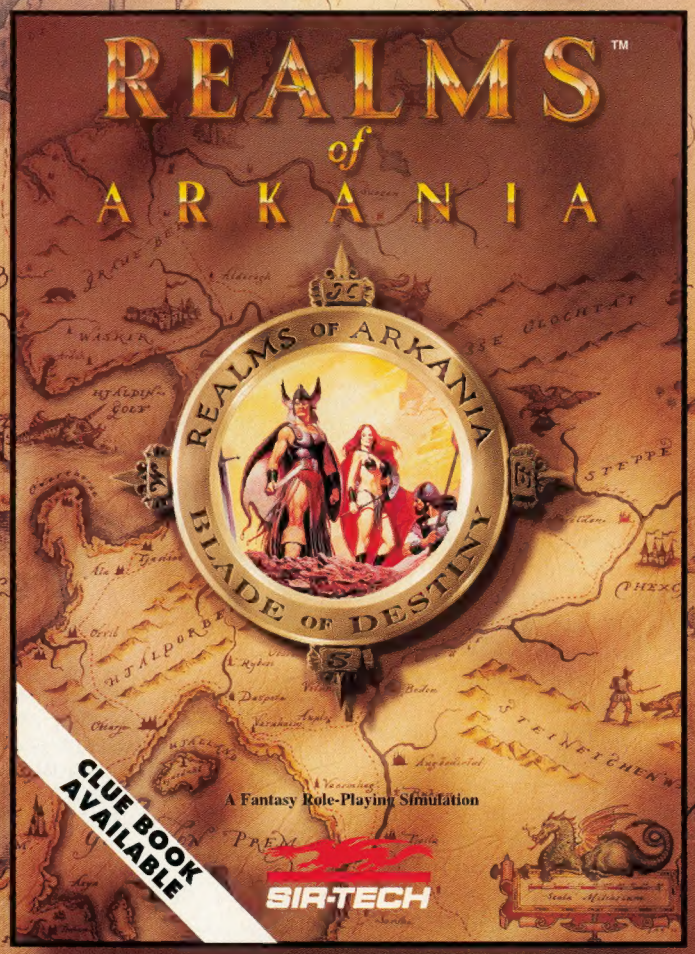

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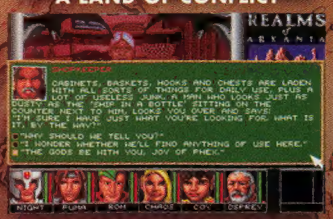

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For customer service, write Game Players Customer Service Dept., 23-00 Route 208, Fair Lawn, NJ 07410. Postmaster please send change of address to *Game Players PC Entertainment*, 23-00 Route 208, Fair Lawn, NJ 07410.

Corporate, advertising sales, and circulation offices: 23-00 Route 208, Fair Lawn, NJ 07410. Phone: (201) 703-9500; FAX: (201) 703- 9509. Editorial and production offices: 300-A S. Westgate Drive, Greensboro, NC 27407. Phone: (910) 852-6711; FAX: (910) 632-1165. Editorial product information should be addressed to Editor, Game Players PC Entertainment, P.O. Box 29364, Greensboro, NC 27429.

Overnight delivery parcels should be addressed to Game Players, 300-A S. Westgate Drive, Greensboro, NC 27407. Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned or acknowledged. GP Publications, Inc., also publishes *Game Players Nintendo Sega*, *CD-ROM Today: The Magazine of Personal Multimedia*, *Computer Entertainment News*, and *Game Players Encyclopedias* covering Nintendo, Sega, and PC games.

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Produced in U.S.A.

GAME PLAYERS PC Entertainment

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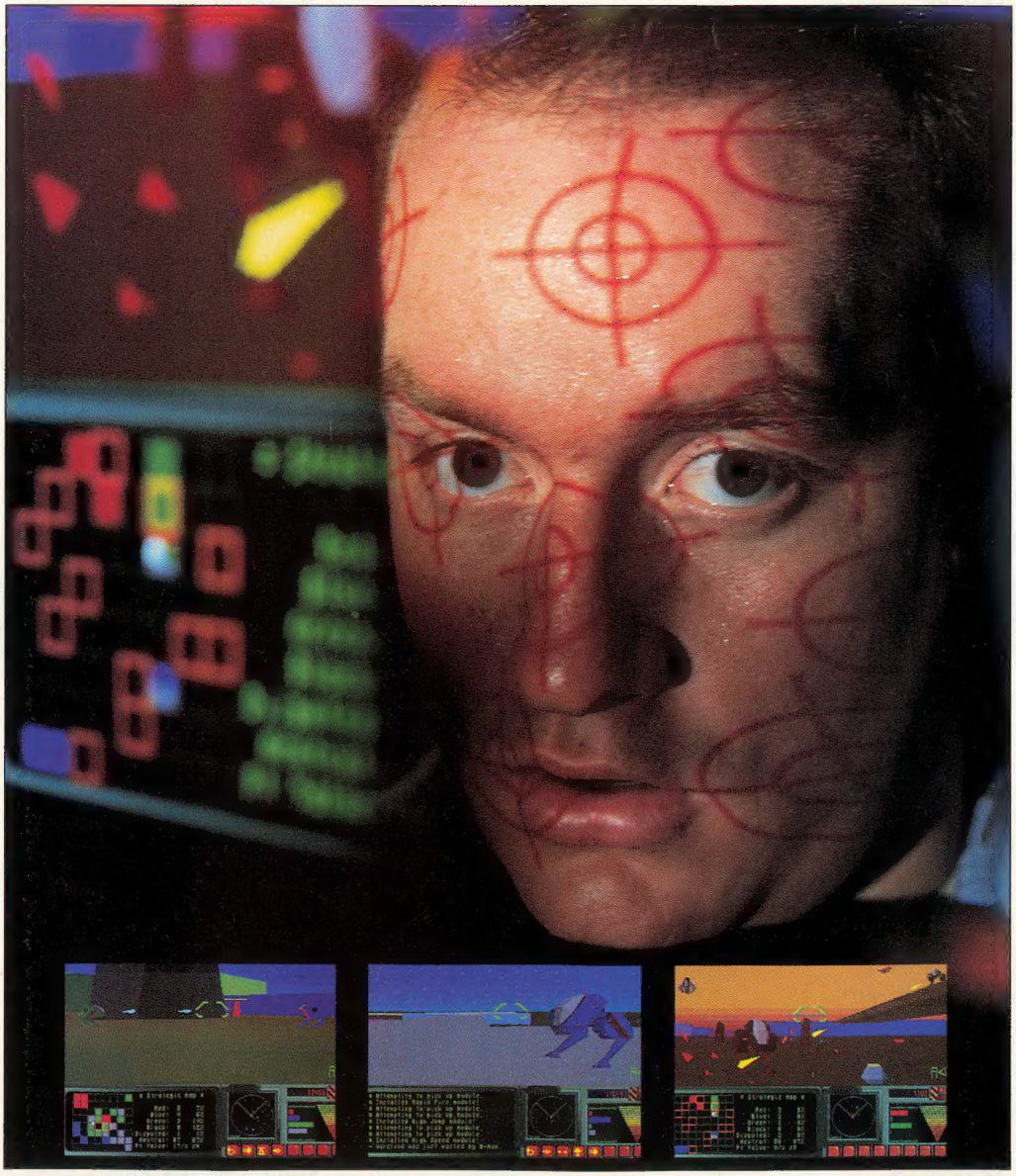

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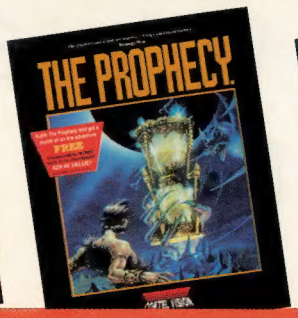

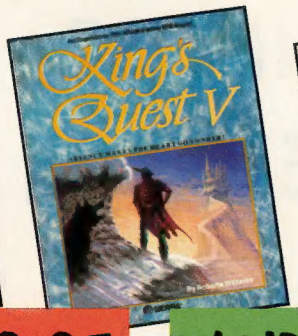

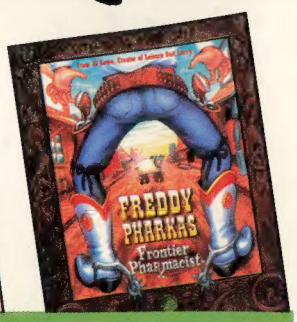

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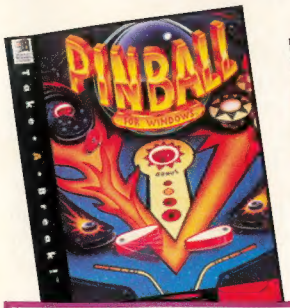

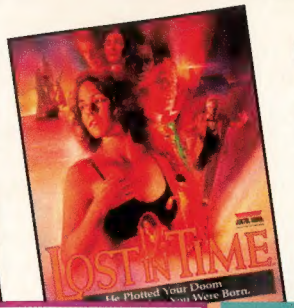

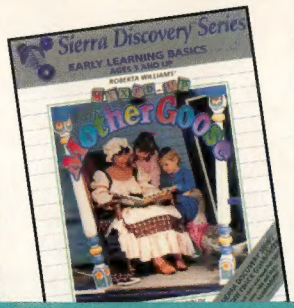

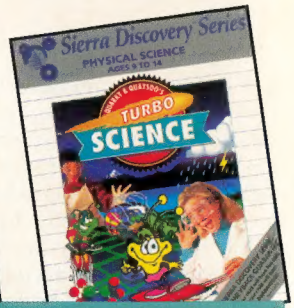

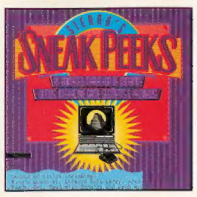

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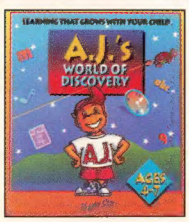

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Product Information Number 109

PC GAMING NEWS

SIGN ON THE DOTTED LINE — MERGERS AND PARTNERSHIPS

CH Products, manufacturer of joysticks, flight yokes, game cards, and other PC peripherals, has expanded its horizons by signing a licensing agreement to develop peripherals for the **3DO**. The company, currently the largest U.S. manufacturer of analog joysticks, will be among the first to design and produce a 3DO-compatible analog joystick.

Three-Sixty Pacific (*Harpoon, V for Victory*) has ended its longtime association with **Electronic Arts** as a member of its Affiliated Label program by signing an exclusive North American distribution agreement with **Broderbund**. Broderbund will only be marketing Three-Sixty products published after January 1, 1994, so Three-Sixty will continue to sell their entire product line through direct marketing. You can reach Three-Sixty at (800) 653-1360.

"Software Toy" publisher **Maxis** has entered the home creativity market, albeit indirectly, by acquiring *Instant Art* (formerly published by **Autodesk**) and taking over the distribution of *KidArt: Typefaces* by **Imager, Inc.** The re-named and upgraded version of *Instant Art* will mark their first non-entertainment release.

In addition, **Maxis** announced distribution of its first CD-ROM programs: *Wrath of the Gods*, developed by **Luminaria**, and *RedShift Multimedia Astronomy* by **Maris Multimedia** of London.

Cyberdreams, publisher of Dark Seed and the recently released CyberRace titles, has signed a distribution agreement with Sony Electronic Publishing.

Cyberdreams has earned a reputation for catching attention on the retail shelf with sculpted package designs.

"We are pleased to associated with the highly acclaimed Cyberdreams," said Randy Thier, vice president of New York-based Sony. Cyberdream CEO Patrick Ketchum added, "The affiliation will allow our products to reach an even greater audience."

THE NEW 486 — INTEL'S 100Mhz DX4

If you're looking for a PC with a bit more power than your 486DX2/66, you've now got two choices: you can opt for a Pentium system, or try the new **Intel** DX4. The 100MHz 486 DX4 boasts performance that rivals the 60Mhz Pentium — and for as much as $500 dollars less. DX4 systems should reach the marketplace by April, and are expected to sell for around $2000, while Pentium systems will start in the $2500 range.

In addition to the super-fast 100Mhz clock speed, the DX4 has a larger onboard cache than do existing 486DX and DX2 processors, so all those new processor-hungry games will perform like never before.

Sounds like upgrade time again!

NOW YOU CAN PUT SOME HEART INTO YOUR CD-ROM DRIVE

Heart/20 Years of Rock and Roll by **The New CD Music Show**, a **Compton's New Media** affiliate, is the first Rock CD-ROM for Level 2 MPC. This multimedia bio of the Wilson Sisters (that's Ann and Nancy to you and me) includes high-quality pictures, videos, and interviews together with over five hours of high-quality sound and music (and over 125 60-second audio clips from 13 Heart albums).

DON'T GET WIRED

QuickFire U.S.A has introduced an infrared wireless gamepad, the Glide Zipper/IR-5. The Glide Zipper is an eight-directional, four-button controller (two buttons are turbofire) that's been ergonomically designed for easy use by either left or right-handed players (though it can't be turned upside down for lefties, like Gravis' PC Gamepad). We've tried it out, and it works great — as good as any normal two-button gamepad we've seen. The Glide Zipper carries an MSRP of $59.95, with a dual player model available for ten bucks more (street prices will doubtless be less).

The Glide Zipper/IR-5

LINKS 386 PRO TOURNAMENTS ON-LINE

Access Software, makers of *Links 386 Pro*, has teamed up with the online service **Computer Sports Network (CSN)** to offer *The Links Tour*, a tournament program that makes it possible for *Links 386 Pro* golfers to compete against each other through CSN.

Players compete according to skill level in weekly 4-round regional tourneys and nation tourneys held every 6 weeks, with competitors actually playing their rounds off-line. The software and a membership for *The Links Tour* are currently being offered for $64.95; for more info call 800-224-4705.

WE STAND CORRECTED!

In the review of *Coaster* in our January/February issue, we mistakenly referred to the "*Thunderseat* from Thrustmaster." It's actually from **Thunderseat Technologies** of 6630 Arizona Circle, Los Angeles, CA, 90045. And going back to our December issue, we listed Thunderseat's *YM-2* (pictured on p. 52) as the *Thunderseat Cowling Shell*. Give 'em a call at (310) 410-0022 and tell them you read these corrections, and you'll receive a discount on your next Thunderseat purchase. Well, you won't get a discount, but you will get to talk to the nice (and understanding) folks at Thunderseat.

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PC GAMING NEWS

COMING ATTRACTIONS

U.K. developer **Bullfrog Productions** is getting quite a reputation for creating "little people" games—no, not games for the vertically challenged, but games like *Populous* (*I* and *II*), *Powermonger*, and *Syndicate* in which you control the fate of dozens, hundreds, or thousands of little folks on your PC. In their newest release, however, there's a twist — you're *serving* those little people! As a theme-park entrepreneur, your goal is to build a park that's safe and comfortable, but still exciting enough to draw the big crowds. Every decision is up to you — you choose the location, pick the rides and attractions, decide what sort of concessions to carry, and hire

I KNOW CHARITY BEGIN'S AT HOME BUT THIS IS SILLY, YOU COULD MAKE YOUR TICKET PRICE HIGHER AND THE LITTLE PEOPLE WHOULD BE JUST AS HAPPY

Theme Park

Activision To Launch New Espionage Line

Activision plans to develop and publish interactive espionage thrillers under the direction and consultation of William Colby, former director of the CIA.

Published under the Infocom label, the first in a line of Colby-influenced multimedia titles will be introduced in early 1995 for the PC CD-ROM platform and in third quarter 1995 for the Macintosh.

"His first-hand experience makes him the key to successful, one-of-a-kind, true-to-life espionage thrillers," says Bobby Kotick, chief executive officer. "After a long search, we finally have found a title that is worthy of being the first original Infocom game in over six years."

The new espionage line, Kotick adds, will have all the elements of a major motion picture release — "high-quality Hollywood production values, recognized talent, feature-film quality sound effects and music, and an intriguing script by a well-known screenwriter."

FROGGMAN GIVES TO HERPETOLOGISTS' LEAGUE

No, it's not for Herpes' research. **Froggman Software** will donate a precentage of the proceeds from their games (*Lethal Tender*, *Terror of the Catacombs*) to the *Herpetologists' League*, which is dedicated to the study and conservation of amphibians and reptiles worldwide.

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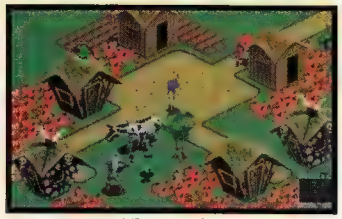
the employees. If you've always wondered what *SimDisneyLand* would be like, you'll want to check out *Theme Park*. Look for it in April.

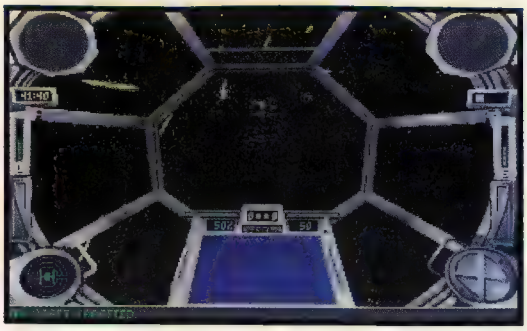


The Horde

Crystal Dynamix has been concentrating its development work on 3DO titles, but now they've announced their first PC release. *The Horde*, which will ship on floppies and CD-ROM, puts players in control of a young hero (played by sitcom star Kirk Cameron in digitized video interludes) trying to defend his village from the ravages of the Horde, a band of vicious monsters. After buying traps, lures, and soldiers to hold back the critters, you take sword in hand and fight off any remaining nasties in a fast-paced arcade sequence. A safe town attracts more residents, generating more tax money which you can use to buy *more* troops, traps, and livestock. The preview version we've been playing boasts some very smooth animation, and game play is pretty addictive. *The Horde* is also slated for an April release.

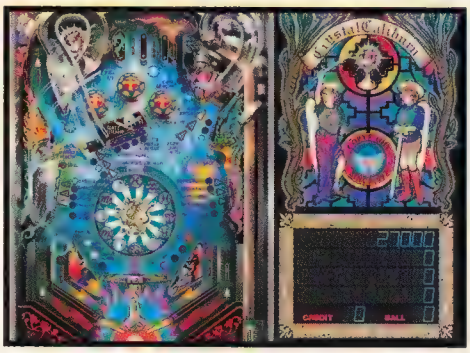
You're at the helm as The Empire strikes back in **LucasArts'** new *Tie Fighter*, sequel to last year's hit *X-Wing*. This time players fly several different classes of Ties, in an effort to crush the Rebellion. *X-Wing* fans will have a lot of relearning to do, as the standard Tie, while very maneuverable, has no defensive shields. The game engine is very much like *X-Wing*'s, but additional detail in the 3-D modeling system has greatly improved the overall look and feel. Players will also rejoice at the open mission selection — no more being forced to win a mission before moving on to the next one. Scheduled to hit shelves in the first quarter of this year, *Tie Fighter* could be the big hit of 1994....

Tie Fighter



Tie Fighter

Little Wing's *Crystal Caliburn* is the newest addition to the growing list of PC pinball titles — which in large part was kicked off with 1992's *Tristan* and 93's *Eight Ball Deluxe*, both developed by Little Wing. Already available for the Macintosh, *Caliburn is* loaded with targets, bonuses, and multi–ball action, giving even the most experienced player new challenges. Pinball aficionados will want to keep an eye out for this one.



Crystal Caliburn

Software Toolworks Gains Rights for NCAA Products

The Software Toolworks and the National Collegiate Athletic Assn. have agreed to a three-year license that will allow The Software Toolworks to develop a line of cartridge and CD-ROM-based sports products based on the NCAA's database of photographs, video clips, audio recordings, and coach and team statistics for all regular season and tournament play.

The license includes the exclusive cartridge product rights to college basketball's "Final Four" for the term of the agreement, exclusive cartridge product rights for college football through Christmas of 1994, and non-exclusive rights to other individual and team college sports for the term of the agreement.

"The NCAA is one of the best sports licenses available," says Bob Lloyd, chairman and CEO of The Software Toolworks. "It appeals to everyone from college graduates who follow their alma mater to sports fans who follow the action. What we have licensed is history: a database of events that represents decades of the finest in sports entertainment. Products based on this license should generate enormous interest in the marketplace."

The Software Toolworks will develop two product lines based on the NCAA license — a line of cartridge games and a line of CD-ROM products.

The first two cartridge products will be action-based recreations that will include the highest ranking college teams. The football game will feature the traditional race for the No. 1 ranking position. The Final Four basketball game will focus on the annual NCAA tournament.

The first three CD-ROM products will be compendiums that will include key events in NCAA history, famous plays, players and coaches, and great moments in sports.

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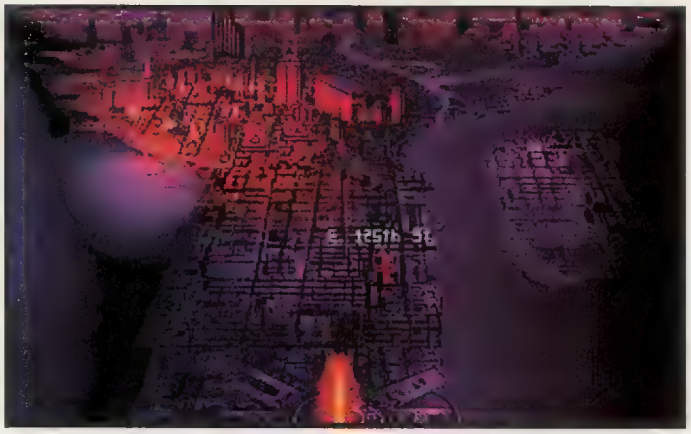
ALTERNATE LIVES

BLOODNET: A CYBERPUNK GOTHIC

NEIL RANDALL

DRACULA MEETS *BLADE RUNNER* IN THE NEW RPG FROM MICROPROSE. IT'S AN INTERESTING COMBINATION, BUT DOES IT WORK?



Bloodnet is a cyberpunk story in the Gibson-Sterling tradition. It's also a vampire story in the Stoker-Rice tradition. The fit probably shouldn't be a good one, and in a novel it might not be. But in the new role-playing game from MicroProse, the premise works: The cyberpunk portion offers setting, while the vampire material provides motive. All that's left is character, and the game succeeds here as well.

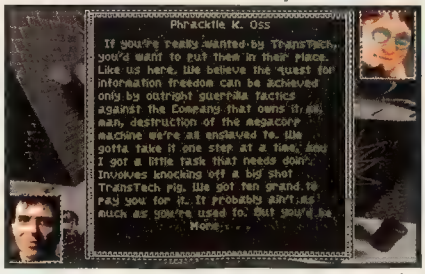
MOTIVE: ONCE BITTEN, TWICE FRANTIC

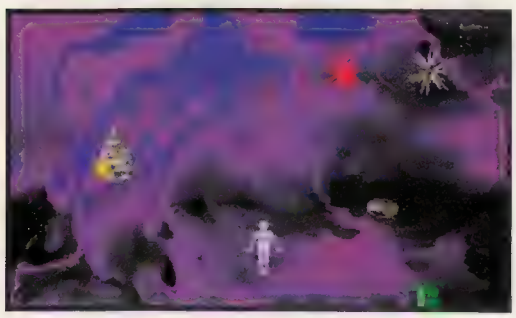
Your name is Ransom Stark (good name — evocative and sufficiently mysterious). The year is 2094, and Manhattan is just crawling with vampires. You've been bitten by one, and you have only a short while to find a cure. If you don't, you become a vampire yourself.

Old story, but no less powerful for being so. Fact is, many RPGs offer little reason to press forward. *Bloodnet* is different. We know about vampires, and at some point in our lives, in movies or books, they might well have frightened us. Ransom Stark is becoming one, and your actions are all that stand between him and eternal undeath.

True to the vampire tradition, *Bloodnet* even has an element of gore. Every so often, you have to drink blood. If you don't do it voluntarily, the game will force you to bite someone you're near, even the members of your own party. But every time you drink it, you become less human, until eventually you can't cure your condition. That's what drives you forward.

Because you're already part vampire, you have to be careful. Manhattan is arrayed against your kind. You'll find churches and cloisters where you'll be killed on sight, so you'll need disguises. But more importantly, you'll need to find a way out — out of the city, and out of your deadly predicament. And the only escape lies in finding people who will help you, and by jacking into cyberspace and finding the things you need.


Phracktle K. Oss
If you're really wanted by TransTech, you'd want to put them in their place. Like us here. We believe the quest for information freedom can be achieved only by outright guerrilla tactics against the Company that owns it all, man, destruction of the megacorp machine we're all enslaved to. We gotta take it one step at a time, and I got a little task that needs doin'. Involves knocking off a big shot TransTech rig. We got ten grand to pay you for it. It probably ain't as much as you're used to, but you'd be



SETTING: HACKING THROUGH THE GRUNGE

Cyberspace: the web, the net, the matrix. It's all over the news right now — and if QVC, AT&T, Viacom, and the rest of the "Information Highway" crew have their way, it'll be both the way we do business and a way of life by the turn of the century. So far, though, cyberspace fiction — called cyberpunk because of its starkness, its anti-authoritarian leanings, and (oddly) its slickness — has offered only dystopian views of the future. Nobody who's read William Gibson's *Neuromancer* or Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* really wants to be part of the future they paint, yet that may well be the future that all the new technology is leading towards. And it's the one we find in *Bloodnet*. If the vampire stuff provides the gore, the cyberpunk setting gives us the grunge.

Bloodnet's Manhattan is in a battle between mega-corporate control and rebel hacker individualism — same old cyberpunk story, but the game gives it life. You'll recruit party members from the Abyss (a meeting place in Times Square) and travel to Wall Street, Washington Square, and a wide range of other neighborhoods to talk to, work with, and fight against others like yourself. The number of characters in this game is daunting, be-

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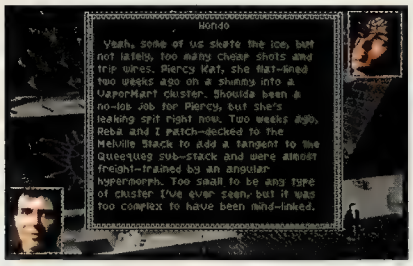
Product Information Number 134

cause most have something to offer you so you have to contact as many of them as you can. Fortunately, interaction with the characters is handled quite well.

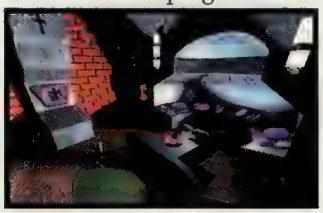
INTERFACE: KEEPING UP THE TEMPO

Bloodnet's well-designed interface does away with four nearly constant RPG problems. First, rather than walking from place to place, you just call up a New York City map, click on the destination you want, and you're there. The idea is that you're riding the subway, but since a nifty subway animation would be enjoyable only once or twice, the designers have dispensed with travel graphics altogether. There's too much to do in this game to worry about how you'll get from place to place.


Mondo
Yeah, some of us skate the ice, but not lately, too many cheap shots and trip wires. Piercy Kat, she flat-lined two weeks ago on a shimmy into a VaporMart cluster. Shoulda been a no-lob job for Piercy, but she's leaking spit right now. Two weeks ago, Reba and I patch-decked to the Melville Stack to add a tangent to the Queerques sub-stack and were almost freight-trained by an angular hypermorph. Too small to be any type of cluster I've ever seen, but it was too complex to have been mind-linked.

Inventory management, the bane of many RPGs, is handled beautifully here. You can carry only a limited of items, but any objects you pick up while you have a full load automatically go into the inventory of anyone in your party who has an empty slot. Then, when you call up the inventory screen, you have access to the inventories of all party members at the same time. And you can move any item from one inventory to another — no tedious trading of items here, so you can concentrate on doing what you have to do.

Third, the interface provides a more than workable means of keeping track of information. In keeping with the whole idea of cyberspace, *Bloodnet* assaults you with details. At any one location you'll talk with three to six characters, many of whom apparently want to talk you to death. If you had to write it all down you'd give up almost instantly, but you don't have to. Instead, the game lets you replay all the conversations you've had, so you can keep track of your contacts and what they've told you. This feature could be improved by showing you *where* your conversations took place (though most characters are tied to specific locations), but it works nevertheless.



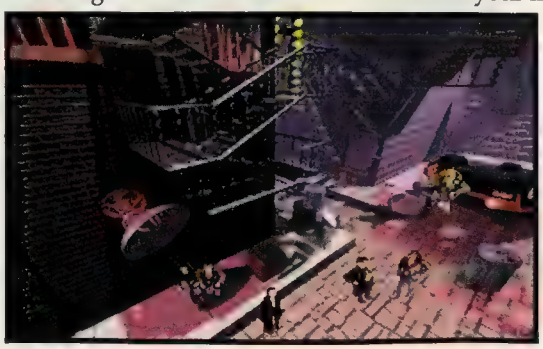
Another burdensome task lifted from your shoulders is deciding which character should perform which task. When you're buying an item, for instance, the best bargainer will automatically take the job. Since the idea in this game isn't to progress in skills (the game takes place over too short a time span), this system works superbly, and let's you focus on finding a cure for your vampiric tendencies.

COMBAT: FIGHTING FOR YOUR LIFE

Combat isn't frequent, but when it happens it's deadly. Seems like everyone's toting laser pistols, assault rifles, and advanced explosives, so survival is tenous at best. The combat system itself is fast and enjoyable. You begin by placing your characters wherever you want them on the field of battle. Then you issue orders to each, or let the computer handle as many as you want. If you're firing a weapon, you can aim at specific body areas, and you can try such tactics as maneuvering or exerting your will. In Ransom's case, you can even bite your enemies to get the blood you need to survive. It's a system that's perfectly suited to the storyline, and feels exactly right.

MIND, BODY, AND SOUL

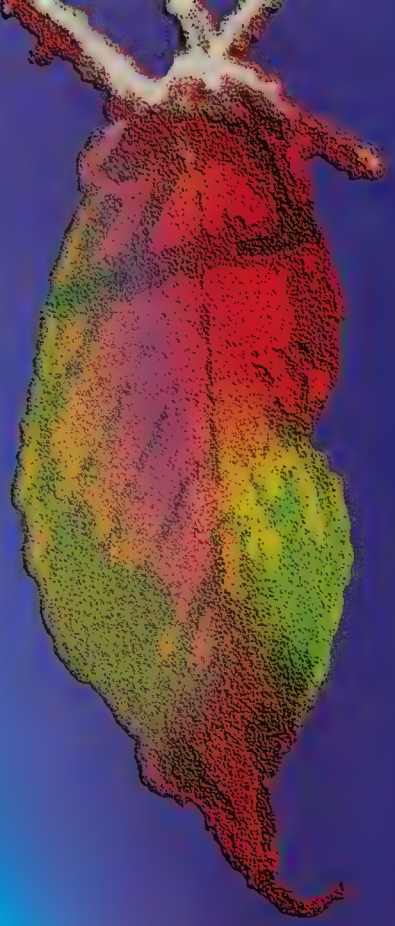
Wherever you find a docking unit, you can enter cyberspace. Of course your body is vulnerable while your mind is away, so it's best to jack in only at safe locations. Once in cyberspace, you see an android-like representation of yourself spinning among objects of various kinds, some of which you can retrieve, others you can talk to. One, the FAT unit, lets you jump into restricted nets called WELLs, where you find the most interesting stuff in the game. You can plant viruses, find virtual friends trapped in data cages, and begin sabotaging the mega-corporation that's gunning for you.



Still, *Bloodnet*'s rendition of cyberspace is a little disappointing. It's too simplistic, and doesn't convey the speed and chaos as well as the cyberpunk authors' descriptions. But it takes thought, planning, and logic to get through the cyberspace sequences, and that's the real point.

Cyberspace is about the mind, and *Bloodnet* captures that quality perfectly. You have to think hard to solve this game, and it's easy to feel that you don't know enough to understand what the characters are talking about (this is the first game I know of that quotes theorist Umberto Eco and paraphrases Roland Barthes, for instance). But feeling uncertain is only natural, since the whole idea of cyberspace is to toss minds that seek order into databanks that defy our control.

Which brings us back to vampires. A cyberhacker's life is controlled not by the body, but by the mind; a vampire's life is completely opposite. What *Bloodnet* does so nicely is make you worry about both. Sure it may be hokey — what's a vampire doing in 2094 Manhattan anyway? — but the hokiness fits. Vampire literature has been hokey since its inception, after all, and in its own way cyberpunk is as well. *Bloodnet* puts them both together, and draws you into its unique, involving world.



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PC GAMER

RAVE REACTIONS

We've already launched a European edition of *PC GAMER* (whose cover is shown here), and the reactions have been tremendous! Listen to these reader comments:

"Why's it taken so long to bring this great idea to press? I've been waiting for a magazine like this for simply ages!"
Ian Davies

"Keep up the excellent disk. It was blinding this month! Brilliant!"
Daniel Taylor

"You managed to fit so many reviews into your magazine."
Paul Rutter

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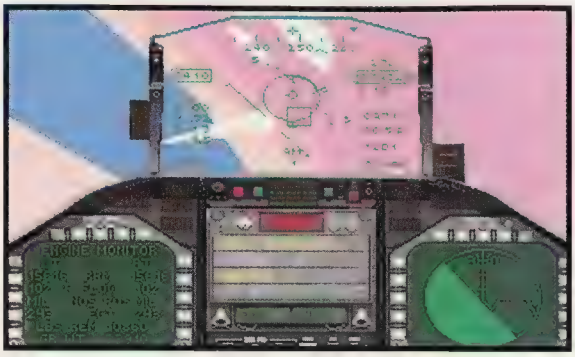
EXTENDED PLAY

ADD-ONS • SCENARIO DISKS • UPGRADES • BUG PATCHES

HORNET: BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

T. LIAM MCDONALD



Hornet

There's a good reason why *Falcon 3.0* is condsidered by many to be the finest computer flight simulator around. **Spectrum HoloByte** not only created a superior sim, but continues to support it aggressively with frequent updates and add-on disks, the latest being *Hornet: Naval Strike Fighter*. Though not as scorching a product as the *MiG-29* add-on, *Hornet* is required flying for owners of *Falcon 3.0* or the *MiG-29* stand-alone.

Hornet

The F/A-18 Hornet is a potent, carrier-based fighter-bomber, employing a full complement of air-to-air and air-to-ground weapons, radar (though not infrared) tracking capabilities, and anti-radar strike capabilities. As a dogfighter, it doesn't exactly shine when compared to the F-16 or MiG-29, but it holds its own. In emergency situations, it can achieve up to a 50-degree Angle of Attack, but this can be limited in *Hornet* by an AOA limiter. A unique feature, the AOA limiter (when set) keeps the F/A-18 from any AOA greater than 25 degrees. Real F/A-18s don't have one, but it was added here since the physical sensations that alert a pilot to a dangerous AOA could not be simulated.

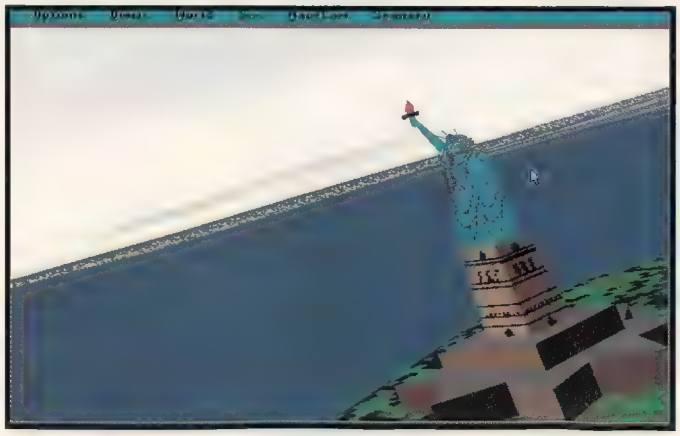
The joy of the *Hornet* disk is that it finally brings carrier launches and landings to the *Falcon* simulation. There's a whole new challenge in using a catapult launcher to take off, and in landing on a moving carrier, snagging one of three arresting wires with your tailhook. As if the thrill of carrier operations wasn't enough, *Hornet* adds a whole new theater with Bosnia-Hercegovina. Combined F/A-18 and F-16 missions are based in Sarajevo, while F/A-18-only missions are based on the *U.S.S. Roosevelt* in the Adriatic Sea. They involve clearing roads and bridges, neutralizing artillery sites, protecting air bases, and providing support for the advance into Serbian territory.

Hornet is a dynamite product, and it brings a whole new dimension to the *Falcon* world. Don't miss it.

Microsoft Flight Simulator

There's a mess of add-ons for *Microsoft Flight Simulator 5.0*, so let's get started!

Microsoft has issued their first two scenery enhancements for *MFS 5.0*: *New York* and *Paris*. The improved detail these offer make them well worth the hard-drive space they require. *New York* adds over a dozen new airports in New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut, with hot new graphics along the way. You can buzz Wall Street, circle the Statue of Liberty, or cruise low over the Hudson. It all looks super.



Microsoft Flight Simulator 5.0: New York

The French may not like letting Americans use their airspace (remember Libya?), but you can still see Paris from above. Microsoft's *Paris* enhancement has all those French sites that made Hitler's mouth water: the Eiffel Tower, the Champs de Mars, the Arc de Triomphe, the Paris Opera, and more. The soaring spires of Notre-Dame and the brightly colored Pompidou Center were particularly striking — especially from ten feet away, just before I smashed into them.

Though I'm an ugly American, I have to admit that the *Paris* disk has, on the whole, better scenery than *New York*. There's simply more to see and enjoy. But both add signifi-

cantly to *MF5.0*, and several new Situation saves make checking out the highlights of each much easier. Night flights in both cities are particularly exciting, with multi-color city lights providing some dazzling visuals. Don't bother with these scenery packs unless you have at least a 486, though, since they tend to slow the sim down quite a bit.

Microsoft Flight Simulator 5.0: Paris

Snow is piled a foot deep and still falling as I write this, so it's not exactly optimal flying weather. But should I want to simulate a flight in current weather conditions, all I'd have to do is pick up **Mallard**'s *Real Weather Pilot*. This is a nifty product for the die-hard *MFS* fan. Working with either version 4.0 or 5.0, *Real Weather Pilot* allows you to choose an origin and a destination for your flight, tie into the Direct User Access Terminal Service (DUATS) with an 800 number, and download current weather reports, weather maps, and radar images for use with *MFS*. *RWP* then creates a weather file for *MFS*, so you can fly in actual weather conditions. A dedicated modem program automates the entire process, and a basic download only takes a few minutes. The 800 number only works in the U.S., however, and only domestic weather is available.

Unfortunately, the first version of *RWP* shipped with a bug that prevented proper connection with DUATS. Mallard addressed the problem immediately, and a patch is available on CompuServe or AOL. You can download directly from Mallard at 214-539-2913 or 214-539-6676.

Mallard has lots more planned for *MSF 5.0*. Their scenery disks generally strain a system more than Microsoft's do, but they pay off with better graphics. Next up is the *Washington D.C.* scenery enhancement. Soon after, you can design your own planes and flight adventures with *Flight Simulator Flight Shot*, which also comes with twelve new plans. *Flight Adventure 825*, providing enhanced air traffic control for various cross-country adventures, is also in the works.

NovaLogic Goes CD

NovaLogic's two major products, *Comanche: Maximum Overkill* and *WolfPack*, are now available on CD-ROM. *Comanche CD* adds *Mission Disk 1*, the new *Comanche: Over the Edge* missions, and 10 extra missions available only on CD, bringing the total to over 100 missions. The classic *WolfPack* now comes with an eye-popping five minute intro and several dozen new missions, bringing the total up to 70 scenarios divided into easy, medium, hard, and two-player games. Both *Comanche* and *WolfPack* from the CD.

Wolfpack

Civilization for Windows

Some games never age, and *Civilization* is a case in point. After two years and huge developments in the gaming industry, it still stands out not only as a benchmark, but as a constantly playable game. Now, it's better than ever. **MicroProse** has done a boffo job of translating it to the Windows environment, with a complete Windows interface. The graphics, right down to the icons, have been substantially improved, with full 256-color and plain 16-color options available. It's a bit slower than the DOS version, and takes up substantially more space, but it's well worth it if you're a Windows user and *Civilization* fan.

Bug Patches

Editor's Note: Contact game publishers for info on bug patch availability

- *The Blue and The Gray* 1.01 : Aside from improving the AI, this patch also changes routing calculations for poor units and errors during troop transport.
- *Clash of Steel* 1.1: General maintenance patch.
- *Empire Deluxe* (DOS) 3.11A: Corrects lockups and updates all sound drivers.
- *Empire Deluxe* (Windows) 3.11B: Will now run correctly run in 256-color mode on 16-bit and 24-bit graphics cards.
- *The Even More Incredible Machine*: Addresses run-time errors and conflicts with 256-color mode.
- *Falcon 3.03*: Makes Falcon comms compatible with *F/A-18 Hornet*.
- *Fantasy Empires* 1.1: Fixes the multiplying siege engine and disappearing hero bugs, as well as most crashes.
- *Fates of Twinion*: Prevents the "Cannot Access Hall of Heroes" messages.
- *Gabriel Knight* 1.0A: Fixes memory allocation errors and lockups. Separate patches for DOS and Windows. Warning: previous saved games will not work with the patched version!
- *Jetfighter II*: Slow-down patch for use with fast machines, turbo, and caching.
- *Kasparov's Gambit* 1.1: Restores chess engine to the full strength of the original 32-bit version of Socrates II, improves driver setups and low-memory detection, makes better use of time controls and rating feature, and many more improvements.
- *Leisure Suit Larry 6*: Solves "Oops" errors and contains bonus sound effects for 8-bit sound cards.
- *MIG-29* 1.02 (add-on or stand-alone versions): Makes *MiG-29* comms compatible with F/A-18 Hornet.
- *Quest for Glory 4*: Fixes memory allocation errors and lockups. Separate patches for DOS and Windows. Warning: Previous saved games will not work with the patched version!
- *Rebel Assault* 1.4: Corrects joystick calibration and control problems, as well as lockups.
- *Return of the Phantom* (CD-ROM): Fixes speech echoes.
- *Sam & Max Hit the Road*: Solves "Tunnel of Love" lockups.
- *Solitaire's Journey* (Windows): Corrects various bugs.
- *Ultima VI*: Music patch for Sound Blaster compatibles and Ad Lib.
- *War In Russia* Update 2: Gary Grigsby's own tweak patch, not available from SSI.
- *Wayne Gretzky Hockey 3* V1.1: Addresses various bugs.
- *World of Xeen* (CD-ROM): Fixes CD switching problem, the boat ride into Rivercity, and other minor bugs.
- *WWII: Battles of the South Pacific*: Corrects ranking errors.
- *X-Wing* I/O Address Patch: For Sound Blaster or compatibles set to other than I/O 220.

.95 MACH. NINETY FEET ABOVE THE GROUND. BOTH SIDES TRYING TO SHOOT HIM DOWN. WOUNDED IN THE ARM, KAPITAN ALEXANDER ZUYEV GUIDED HIS MiG-29 TO FREEDOM LEFT-HANDED. COULD YOU?

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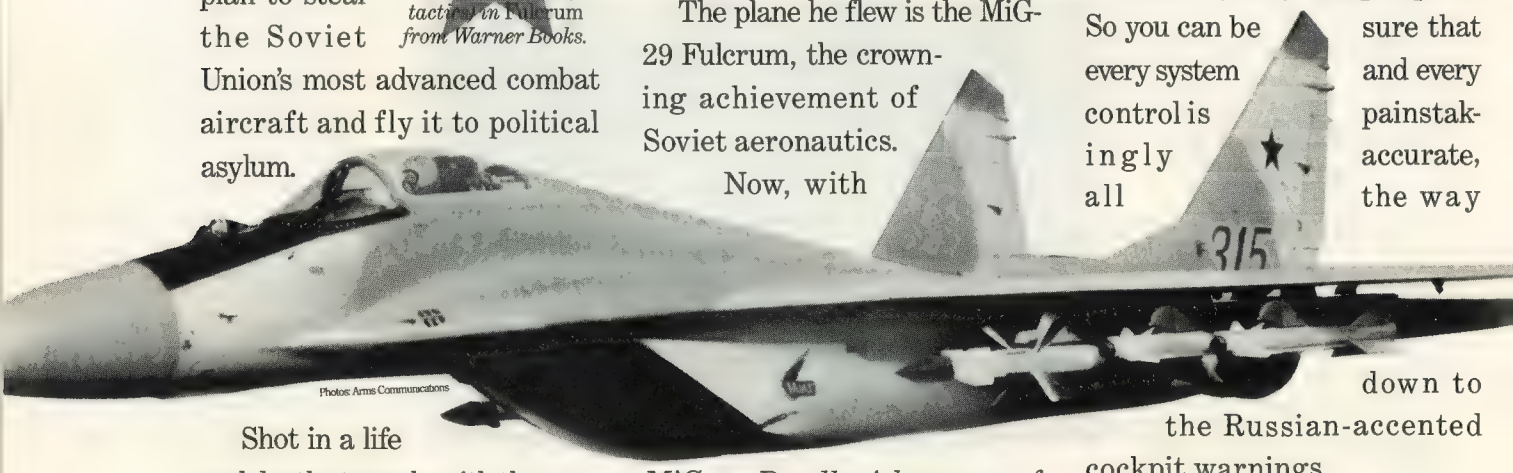
On May 20, 1989 MiG-29 pilot Alexander Zuyev began a desperate plan to steal the Soviet Union's most advanced combat aircraft and fly it to political asylum.

The pilot who wrote the book on the MiG-29, Alexander Zuyev, tells his harrowing story (including authentic Soviet dogfighting tactics) in Fulcrum *from Warner Books.*



Photos: Arms Communications

Shot in a life and death struggle with the sentry, Zuyev managed to take off. Then, flying dangerously low to avoid radar, he eluded pursuing fighters and deadly Soviet and Turkish air defenses to land safely on a civilian airfield in Turkey.

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The plane he flew is the MiG-29 Fulcrum, the crowning achievement of Soviet aeronautics.

Now, with *MiG-29: Deadly Adversary of Falcon 3.0*,™ Spectrum HoloByte's add-on to *Falcon® 3.0,* you can climb into the cockpit of the F-16's nemesis.

NOTHING WAS LOST IN THE TRANSLATION

The flight model was patterned after actual Mikoyan-Gurevich (MiG) design specs. So you can be sure that every system and every control is painstakingly accurate, all the way down to the Russian-accented cockpit warnings.

IT'LL TEST YOUR SKILL AND YOUR PATRIOTISM

Unlike the F-16, the MiG-29 isn't a fly-by-wire aircraft, so a

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For technical questions call (510) 522-1164 (M-F: 9AM-5PM Pacific Time).

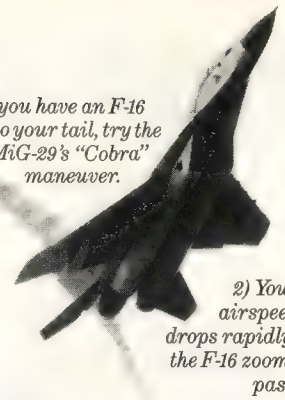
computer never limits your control inputs, whether inspired or foolish. Its twin Isotov RD-33 engines produce 36,600 lbs. of thrust, to the F-16's 25,000. And superb aerodynamics make it controllable at low speeds and high angles of attack that would have enemy pilots fighting to avoid a spin.

The most fearsome opponent is a human one. With EBS, up to six players can go head-to-head.

SPECTRUM HI HEAD AD 2 HOLOBYTE

THEY WON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT HIT THEM

Your MiG's IRST (Infrared Search and Track) system can track an F-16 without revealing your presence on his threat display. So you can get on his six o'clock before he even knows you're there. Once in range, you'll be able to lock on to the Falcon just by turning to look at him with the MiG-29's helmet mounted sight. Then call "pusk" (launch) as you fire missiles or "ogon" (firing) as you ventilate him with your computer-accurate 30mm gun. Either way, his plane will make a satisfying crunch when it hits the ground.



Next time you have an F-16 glued to your tail, try the MiG-29's "Cobra" maneuver.

1) You pull up past a 90 alpha climb.

2) Your airspeed drops rapidly; the F-16 zooms past.

3) You abruptly pitch the nose back to level flight. Now you're on his six, with a little score to settle.

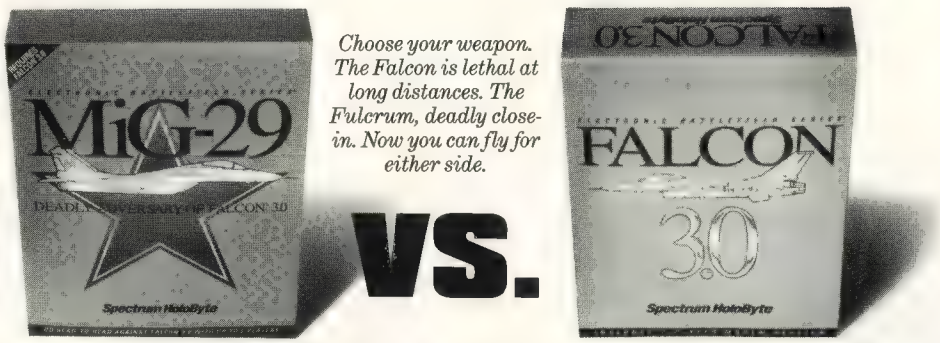
THE ELECTRONIC BATTLEFIELD SERIES: THE ULTIMATE CYBER-BATTLEFIELD

EBS is the first series of interconnecting simulations. Each title works with the others to bring you closer to the real thing.

Now you can choose from multiple aircraft, multiple theaters, even which side of the conflict to fight on. And you can go head-to-head over a modem or with up to six players over a network. It all begins when you add on *MiG-29* to *Falcon 3.0*.

Anything more realistic wouldn't be a simulation.

INTRODUCING MiG-29



Choose your weapon. The Falcon is lethal at long distances. The Fulcrum, deadly close-in. Now you can fly for either side.

MiG-29 *add-on requires* Falcon® 3.0. *Available on IBM compatibles.*

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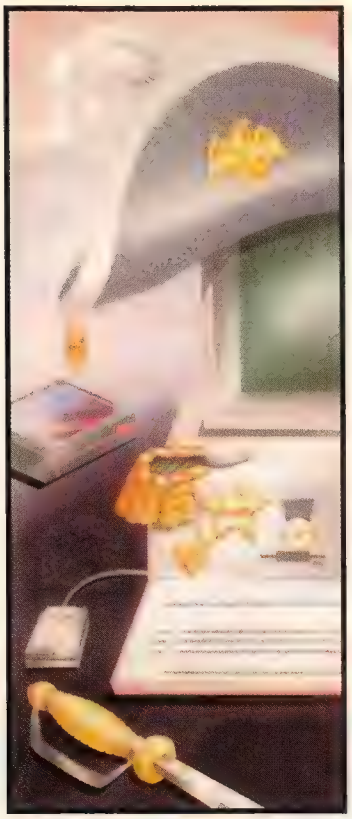
The fight of your life.



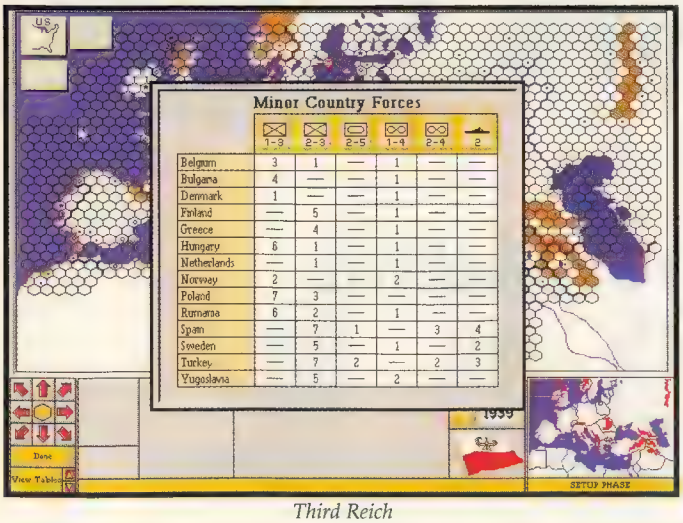
THE DESKTOP GENERAL

AVALON HILL FOREVER!

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

Third Reich

If any one event can be said to have ignited contemporary interest in war games, it was the 1954 appearance of a home-produced board game called *Tactics*. Designed by Charles S. Roberts during his own Army tour of duty, *Tactics* was intended, according to its creator, to enable players to "learn the nuances of the principles of war in a context that was less noisy."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Bulgaria 4 — — 1 — —
Denmark 1 — — 1 — —
Finland — 5 — 1 — —
Greece — 4 — 1 — —
Hungary 6 1 — 1 — —
Netherlands — 1 — 1 — —
Norway 2 — — 2 — —
Poland 7 3 — — — —
Rumania 6 2 — 1 — —
Spain — 7 1 — 3 4
Sweden — 5 — 1 — 2
Turkey — 7 2 — 2 3
Yugoslavia — 5 — 2 — —
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SETUP PHASE

Third Reich

Between 1954 and 1858, Roberts sold enough copies of *Tactics* (about 2,000, he estimates) to convince him that there was a niche market for realistic games that let players try to out-general some of history's great commanders — games that encouraged the addictive pleasures of playing with history. So Roberts founded Avalon Hill, whose initial games included a spruced-up *Tactics II*, *Gettysburg* (the first modern historical board game) and a railroad simulation called *Dispatcher*. And a genre was born.

Before Avalon Hill, anyone attracted to war games either had to invest heavily in tabletop miniatures (with all the problems of storage and playing space inherent to that format), or be content with generic board games such as *Risk* or *Battleship*. I remember vividly the Christmas of 1961, when my parents — evidencing much deeper insight than I gave them credit for — gave me *Gettysburg*. An entire weekend went by before my younger brother and I came up for air, so instantly addicted did we become.

I still have a whole closet full of Avalon Hill board games and I still pull one out every now and then, just for *auld lang syne*. I even made up a set of generic unit-counters so that I could use those marvelously sturdy map boards to construct fantasy scenarios of my own. Some of the maps were actually more fun when used in that manner; a perfect antidote to the rainy-day doldrums.

Although Avalon Hill was one of the first game companies to produce computer games, back in the days of 8-bit Commodores and cassette tape data-storage, the company never quite got its act together during the 1980s. There were spasms of activity and new-product announcements, but not much product — at least not for the PC platform. The company did produce Amiga and Atari ST versions of its hit board game *Rise and Decline of the Third Reich*; but although I was assured as far back as the summer CES of 1989 that a PC version was in the works, it never appeared.

Until now. Under the energetic leadership of Avalon Hill's new director of operations, Jim Rose, the company that started it all is on the verge of a major product launch — spearheaded, aptly enough, by the long-awaited PC version of *Third Reich*.

For the past several days, I've had the great pleasure of exploring a beta version of the new *Third Reich*. The program was still very incomplete; there were no sound effects, and no computer intelligence in place. I had to play both sides, but that was no problem, since, like most board gamers, I had plenty of experience with solitaire setups.

Third Reich opens with a close-up of Hitler's mad, hypnotic eyes, then segues to a title screen with the letters outlined in fire — very snappy. The basic map comes in two versions: one reproduces *exactly* the rather lurid color scheme of the board-game, the other is a more sedate and realistic topographical map. You can switch maps with just a mouse-click.

Everything that made the board game so addictive has been carried over into the PC

version; indeed, the two versions are so close that I was able to use the board game's rulebook to play the PC game. The high-res VGA graphics are sharp enough to shave with, and the point-and-click interface is a streamlined wonder. Even a player coming to the game stone-cold, with no manual, could figure out four-fifths of what he needed to do just by studying the interface and following the simple online instructions that accompany every phase: "Axis Fleet Movement Phase—Select Fleet to Move," for example.

Third Reich

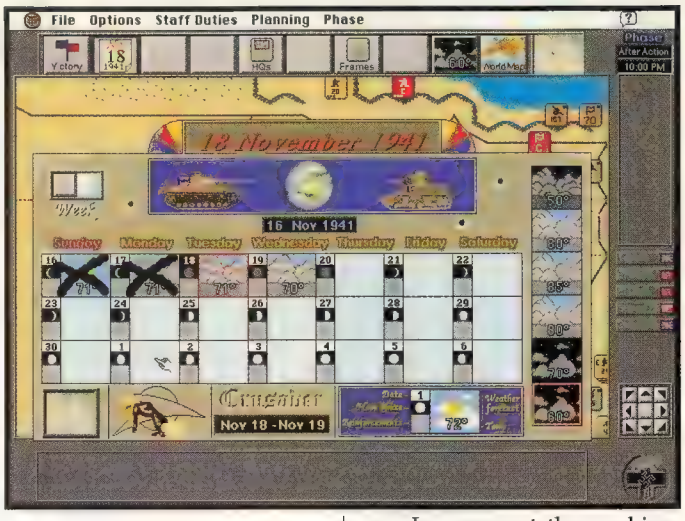
I'm very anxious to play the full production version, with its fully implemented AI, because this is one area where the "new" Avalon Hill really wants to shine. The computerized opponent in *Third Reich* will base its decisions on "neural net" technology; like a human opponent, the machine will be able to learn from its mistakes and will make its decisions based on a thorough analysis of all possible moves and all likely consequences. If successful, this could go a long way toward creating the illusion of doing battle with a canny and aggressive opponent.

Third Reich

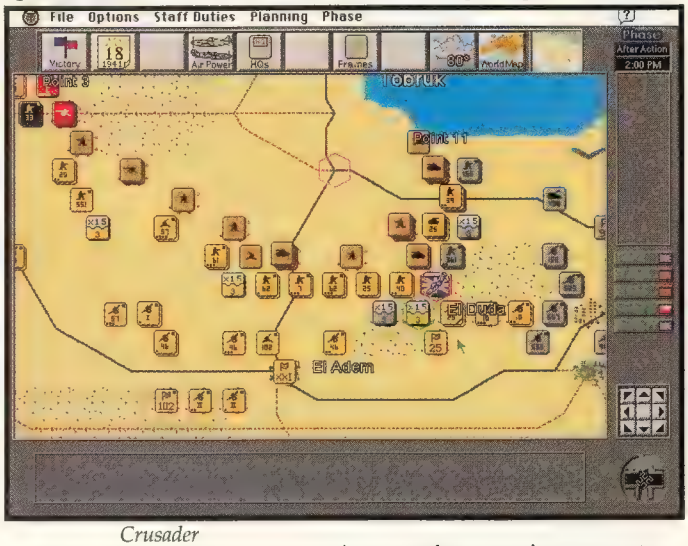
Perhaps even more indicative of the seriousness of Avalon Hill's commitment to PC gaming was another new war game, this one virtually complete, called *Crusader*. No, not the quest for the Holy Grail kind of Crusader; The title refers to the British Crusader tank, and specifically the dramatic 700-tank offensive launched by General Auchinleck on 11/18/41, intended to relieve the besieged garrison of Tobruk.

The reputation of Field Marshal Montgomery (who never won a single battle in which he didn't enjoy a four-to-one advantage over his opponent) has all but eclipsed that of his predecessors in North Africa, Wavell and Auchenleck—both of whom produced solid victories only to be summarily replaced by Churchill because they had the bad luck to be fighting Erwin Rommel, a general who was both brilliant and lucky.

Crusader, in fact, gives a better idea of the see-saw fighting in North Africa before Montgomery's arrival than most desert-war games I've played, either board or computer. For one thing, it's not weighted so that the German units perform like supermen and the Italians like plodding spear-carriers. Most of Rommel's army *was* Italian, and part of his genius lay in obtaining solid battlefield performance from units that were often poorly equipped and led by mediocre officers.



Crusader



Crusader

Interestingly, this is the first game designed for Avalon Hill by the formidably talented Atomic Games, the team behind Three-Sixty's hugely successful V for Victory series. *Crusader* uses the V for V engine (now renamed World At War), and heralds what promises to be a sensational partnership. Atomic is also designing the PC version of *Squad Leader*, by general consensus the greatest tactical war game ever devised.

In any event, the combination of the silky-smooth V-for-Victory engine and the wide-open terrain of the desert make for a sleek, sweet gaming experience. Players who enjoy those tantalizing "might-have-been" scenarios can incorporate a number of interesting variants, such as Axis control of Malta and the absence of Lend-Lease equipment for the Brits. My only negative impression concerned the *length* of the various scenarios, all of which measure 15-30 hours of game-time, or about an hour of play-time. In terms of replay value this seems a bit skimpy, no matter how excellent the scenarios themselves.

Taken together, *Third Reich* and *Crusader* convinced me that Avalon Hill is back and back to *stay*. Let all war-gamers rejoice!

THE LEARNING GAME

DON'T JUDGE A GAME BY ITS COVER

HEIDI AYCOCK

Puddles to Pondwater

As is the case with books, it's pretty easy to judge a learning game by its cover — even though the old adage warns us not to. Some software concepts look so good, I just can't wait to open the box, while others seem like they'll be dull and unoriginal. Take the products in this month's column, for example. I looked at three programs for older children and adults this month: *Puddles to Pondwater* looked like a sure bet for my personal hall of fame, while *America Adventure* sounded like pretty dry stuff, and *Math Ace* seemed destined for my collection of boring drill-and-practice programs. But once I got past the packaging, it turned out that I was wrong on all counts.

Not Much More Than a Drip

Packed with an assortment of 100 creatures from the world's ponds and freshwater ecosystems, *Puddles to Pondwater from* The **Naid Corporation** allows you to explore and observe the wonders of the natural world — or so the package says. Before opening the box, I expected sharp photographic images of animals, with easy-to-digest information and a game shell tieing it all together to make it fun and easy to play.

But right off the bat, I found a major technical flaw: The program wouldn't read my Microsoft mouse properly. I had to click inches away from the buttons and icons I was trying to activate. I also found a static design with no real game element to it — despite the programmers' obvious attempts to create some fun.

In *Puddles to Pondwater*, your goal is to help save the Earth's wildlife by identifying animals for the World Biological Council. You travel through the watery realms of six continents, clicking on silhouettes of previously unclassified creatures. Using a simulated laptop computer, you then answer a series of questions that narrow down the animal's classification until it can be identified and entered in the main computer.

Some of the answers seem obvious, like when the animal is clearly a bird, and the program asks if it has feathers. But other questions are nearly impossible to answer. An animal stands with its back to you, for example, and the program asks if it has a white belly. For more information about the animal, you can refer to the main computer's database (where these unclassified animals have somehow been catalogued). Even in the database, though, many of the classification questions go unanswered.

America Adventure

In my exploration of the program—hampered severely by the mouse problem — I never found any other source of information to help me answer the questions. So, in addition to a dull game-design, your child will face some frustrating barriers to success. I tried exploring something called the Classification Key, hoping it might clear up some of my concerns over how a player is supposed to learn to classify animals without sufficient information from the database. The mouse problems made that investigation too difficult, though. Finally, I gave up trying to work around the program's problems and moved on to the other titles — expecting more disappointment.

A Pleasant Surprise

Far from being the dull program I feared, *America Adven-*

ture turned out to be a real delight. In fact, *American Adventure* on CD-ROM may be my favorite title from **Knowledge Adventure** so far.

The program features several different games and modules that allow you to explore nine aspects of American culture and history. The America Tour allows you to access the programs many articles, pictures, and other information through a simple-but-powerful encyclopedia-style interface. It's here that you'll find facts about American history, natural wonders, the arts, and more.

Natural Wonders
US
GREAT PLAINS OF AMERICA
For centuries, Native Americans of the Great Plains were a nomadic civilization. They moved around America following their source of food, buffalo and other roaming animals. To suit their needs, they developed a
Native American Mobile Home
1986
1700
1800
1900
2000
America Adventure

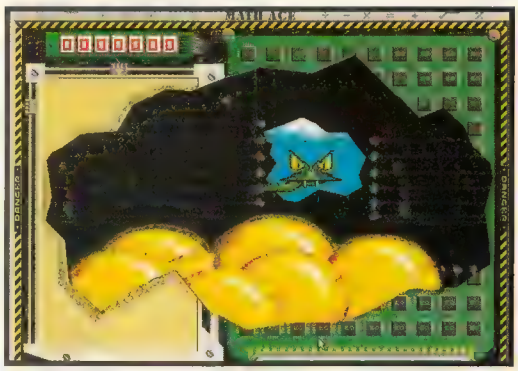
There are also games that test and teach U.S. geography, asking you to match the states with their capitols, find specific states, and so on. A collection of 15 movies, couched in a neat drive-in theater interface, include some striking glimpses of U.S. landscape, such as Alaska's Glacier Bay, news clips of important events like Richard Nixon's resignation and Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I Have A Dream" speech.

Most impressive of the modules is a section which shows portraits of each U.S. president. It's actually an animated *morphing* of these portraits, so you get to watch as George Washington's features melt into John Adams', Grover Cleveland becomes Benjamin Harrison who becomes Grover Cleveland again, and George Bush becomes Bill Clinton. When Franklin Roosevelt's grin crept across his predecessor's face, I realized he was the first president to smile for his portrait. I wondered what image he was trying to convey, and what changes in the White House might allow this optimistic expression to be recorded for posterity. Voice clips accompany the strange visual trip through presidential history, illustrating the humor and power of the chief executives. Not every president is represented in these sound clips, and their sources are never identified. But part of the fun is to try to figure out who said what based on the content or character of the quote. This hypnotic module is one of the most interesting elements I've seen in a program like this.

America Adventure shows the excellence Knowledge Adventure hopes to instill in all its products. I've been amazed by the quality of some of these programs, and dismayed at the dullness of others. Your best bet with the Knowledge Adventure series is to try the software before you buy it, because it's not all as exciting as *America Adventure*.

Another Pleasant Surprise

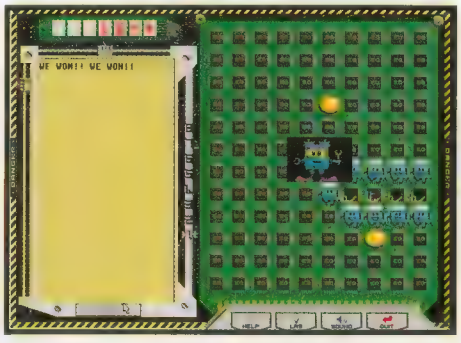
When I ran *Math Ace* from **Magic Quest**, I was again unexpectedly sucked into a program that I would never have guessed could have been so much fun. Math has never been my strong suit, and a lot of the topics in this program were from courses I failed in school. However, *Math Ace* has such an engaging game design that I didn't mind struggling through the problems — even when I got the wrong answers.



Math Ace

The game pits you and an amiable robot against some computer viruses that are plaguing the Global Math Archives. By answering math problems correctly, you build a wall around each wriggling green virus and keep it from spreading. Occasionally, you fight duels with the virus, using knowledge of geometry, probability, and — Isaac Newton help us — algebra. Sometimes you even get to try breaking a code to move from one level to the next. The variety of problems is one of the nicest aspects of the program, because it offers convincing evidence that math can be useful and even fun.

Beneath all the smoke and mirror of the game's story line, the program is really just a drill-and-practice tool. But the game shell does a good job of alleviating the drudgery of simply figuring out problems in a workbook: First, it creates a sense of urgency through its arcade aspects; second, it spices up the subject matter with color and simple animation; and third, the main characters in the game are interesting — especially the virus that sounds like Darth Vader!



Math Ace

Although I'm an admitted math wimp, I was impressed with *Math Ace*. For the first time in my life, I've found a reason to try to figure out how to plot a function: Every time I reach that particular duel with the virus, I lose. And it's really starting to bug me.

Why Do Some Succeed Where Others Fail?

I was honestly surprised when the one program that looked so good on the surface turned out to be such a letdown, while the two that seemed so ho-hum turned out to be spectacular. It makes me wonder why some programs succeed, and others fail.

Of course, there are several reasons why some programs work, and others don't. But in the case of these three programs, the biggest reason seems to be that *America Adventure* and *Math Ace* were simply more fun than *Puddles to Pondwater*. In *America Adventure*, the information was presented in an entertaining and very accessible way that really encouraged exploration. In *Math Ace*, the game play was so much fun that I *wanted* to do more math, so I could progress to higher levels.

America Adventure and *Math Ace* just did a better job of entertaining. Sure, I was learning. But that was just a fringe benefit, and not my motivation for playing. The way I see it, that's the very definition of successful edutainment.

The Best of 1993

GAME PLAYERS PC Entertainment

1 9 9 3

GAME OF THE YEAR

1993 could well go down as one of the pivotal years in the history of PC gaming. Despite the arrival of new platforms like 3D0, more affordable Macintosh computers, and the Sega CD, one look at the number of high-quality games that were released for the PC is indisputable proof that this is the system of choice for creating challenging, attractive games for players of all levels of ability.

For PC gaming, it was the year of MORE — more game designers and publishers, more types of sound boards, more CD-ROM titles, more graphics cards, more joysticks and peripherals, and more games than we've seen released in any previous year. And these weren't merely old games in new clothes — we saw unique and innovative designs everywhere we looked.

Let's take a look at the titles we considered the very best of 1993 — games that will continue to be bought and played for quite a while to come.

Game of the Year: *Alone in the Dark*

Published by I-Motion, developed by Infogrames.

Runner-up: *X-Wing* by LucasArts

Alone in the Dark makes *you* the star of a horror movie based on the macabre tales of H.P. Lovecraft. As either a male or female character, you must battle your way through an eerie mansion filled with monsters and spirits, and interpret clues that will help you eventually destroy the demonic spirit that pervades the house. Guns, ghosts, ghouls, and gore — add 'em all up and you've got FUN.

CD-ROM Game of the Year:

Return to Zork

Published and developed by Activision

Runner-up: *The 7th Guest* by Virgin Interactive

Great acting, great puzzles, great plot! *Return to Zork* sets new standards for CD-ROM adventures by bringing Hollywood-style production values to computer games. A treat for the eyes and ears that you don't want to miss!

Best Role-Playing Game:

Riftwar: Betrayal at Krondor

Published and developed by Dynamix

Runner-up: Dark Sun: Shattered Lands by SSI

Fantasy role-playing games can be pretty predictable — kill the monster, take the gold — but not *Riftwar: Betrayal at Krondor*, thanks to an absorbing, well-paced plot, innovative combat system, and an interface that truly deserves the "user-friendly" moniker. Dynamix's first foray into role playing is a hands-down winner.

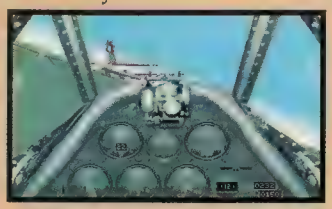
Best Simulation:

Aces Over Europe

Published and developed by Dynamix

Runner-up: Indycar Racing by Papyrus Publishing

If you're one of the thousands of air-combat fans who thrilled to *Aces of the Pacific*, you'll love *Aces over Europe*. *Aces'* high-res (400 x 200) VGA graphics make for the smoothest, most realistic aircraft we've seen in a sim this playable. From heart-pounding ground-attack missions to twisting, turning dogfights, *Aces Over Europe* brings the intensity of air combat in WWII to your PC.



Best Sports Game:

NHL Hockey

Published and developed by Electronic Arts

Runner-up TIE: Front Page Sports: Football Pro by Dynamix and Tony LaRussa Ultimate Baseball II by SSI

NHL Hockey combines in-depth stats and coaching options with intense, in-your-face action out on the ice. Whether you coach a team or take actual control of the players for some breakneck arcade fun, *NHL Hockey* delivers realism *and* excitement.

Best Arcade-Action Game: *X-Wing*

Published and developed by LucasArts

Runner-up: Syndicate by Electronic Arts

You want action? Then strap yourself into *X-Wing* and get ready for the battle of your life! The super-smooth animation and white-knuckled combat of *X-Wing* will satisfy even the most jaded arcade fan, and two add-on disks — *Imperial Pursuit* and *B-Wing* — bring even more value to this outstanding product.

Best Graphic Adventure:

Day of the Tentacle (CD-ROM version)

Published and developed by LucasArts

Runner-up: Sam and Max Hit the Road by LucasArts

It's a cartoon! It's an adventure game! It's *both*! First-rate voice-acting brings a zany cast of characters to amazing life in the CD-ROM sequel to *Maniac Mansion*. Two tentacles up!

Best Educational Game:

Putt Putt Joins the Parade

Published and developed Humongous Entertainment

Runner-up: Thinking Things by Edmark

A talking car hardly seems educational, but as your kids guide Putt Putt through screen after screen of gorgeous graphics and wonderful animations they learn basic logic and problem-solving skills. And the program's excellent digitized speech will captivate children and charm adults. *Putt Putt* earns an A+!

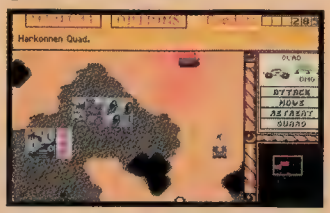
Best Strategy Game:

Dune II

Published by Virgin Interactive, developed by Westwood Studios

Runner-up: Master of Orion by MicroProse

The desert world of Arrakis is the setting for this masterful blend of strategy, tactics, and resource management. Fast-paced combat, challenging opponents, and excellent graphics make *Dune II* one of the most outstanding sci-fi games we've seen.



Best War Game:

Gary Grigsby's War in Russia

Published by SSI, developed by Gary Grigsby

Runner-up: High Command by Three-Sixty Pacific

With *War in Russia*, Gary Grigsby captures the epic sweep and strategic complexity of the Russian Front campaigns — and still manages to convey the ask-no-quarter bloodiness of the individual battles. A crowning achievement by a master gamesman.

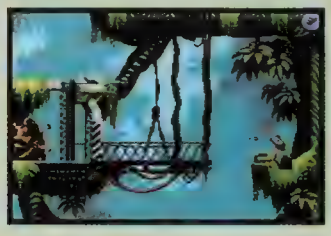
SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENTS 1993

Special Achievement in Animation:

Flashback

Published by SSI, developed by Delphine Software

This might be the most realistic movement you've ever seen in a computer game — 24 frames-per-second of rotoscoped animation make the action-packed world of *Flashback* an arcade fan's delight! And a heapin' helpin' of puzzles will draw you in with every new screen. Check it out!



Special Achievement in Design Excellence:

The Living Book Series

Published and developed by Broderbund

Broderbund practically invented "animated books" with *Just Grandma and Me* in 1992, but the company's three releases this year —*Arthur's Teacher Trouble*, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, and *The New Kid on the Block* — prove that it is the undisputed master of the genre. Each is a wonder-filled world of exploration for kids and adults alike.

EXCELLENCE AWARDS

There can be only one winner in each category of our annual awards, but there were plenty of games released last year that deserve recognition as significant achievements. We'd like to extend our congratulations to the publishers and developers of these titles, all of which we feel provide first-rate entertainment for PC gaming enthusiasts.

- **Beat the House** (Spirit of Discovery)
- **Clash of Steel** (SSI)
- **Dark Sun: Shattered Lands** (SSI)
- **Eight Ball Deluxe** (AmTex)
- **Eric the Unready** (Legend)
- **Eternam** (Capstone)
- **Freddy Pharkas, Frontier Pharmacist** (Sierra)
- **Front Page Sports: Football Pro** (Dynamix)
- **Hardball III** (Accolade)
- **High Command** (Three-Sixty)
- **Indycar Racing** (Papyrus Publishing)
- **Links Course Disks** (Access)
- **Master of Orion** (MicroProse)
- **Pinball Dreams** (21st Century Entertainment)
- **Privateer** (Origin)
- **Sam and Max Hit the Road** (LucasArts)
- **Stunt Island** (Disney)
- **Task Force 1942** (MicroProse)
- **Thinking Things** (Edmark)
- **Tony LaRussa Ultimate Baseball II** (SSI)
- **Tornado** (Spectrum Holobyte)
- **Ultima VII Part 2: Serpent Isle** (Origin)
- **Ultima Underworld II: Labyrinth of Worlds** (Origin)
- **Warlords II** (SSG)
- **Wayne Gretzky Hockey III** (Bethesda)
- **World Circuit** (MicroProse)
- **World of Xeen** (New World Computing)
- **X-Wing Add-on Disks** (LucasArts)

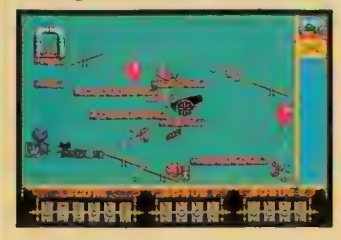
Best Puzzle Game:

The Even More Incredible Machine

Published by Dynamix, developed by Jeff Tunnell Productions

Runner-Up: Lemmings 2: The Tribes by Psygnosis

The Even More Incredible Machine is Dynamix-founder Jeff Tunnel's mad attic of twisted puzzle design. Oddball objects — from basketballs to pistols — must be assembled to perform various tasks, and what at first seems a simple diversion quickly becomes a major obsession. Brain-teasing fun at its best!



Special Achievement in Graphics:

The 7th Guest

Published by Virgin Interactive, developed by Trilobyte

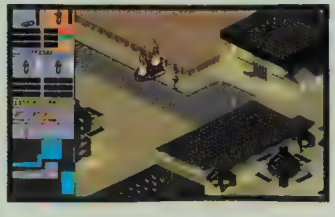
Need to prove that the CD-ROM drive you just purchased is worthwhile? Then load up *The 7th Guest* and watch your friends "ooh" and "aah" in amazement at the incredible graphics that serve as the eerie backdrop for a collection of classic puzzles.

Special Achievement in Innovative Design:

Syndicate

Published by Electronic Arts, developed by Bullfrog

You've played squad-level combat games, and you've played sci-fi shooters, but you've never played anything like *Syndicate*. Created by the folks who brought us the classic *Populous*, this intriguing mix of strategy and frenzied arcade mayhem struck a nerve in everyone that saw it or played it.



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INFINITE CHEAT GENERATOR
Action Replay has a [illegible] feature that actually scans through the [illegible] FROZEN STATE and finds the locations that control lives, ammo, [illegible] The unique CHEAT GENERATOR then gives you a cheatcode for that game. Imagine being able to restart the game and you are invincible!! Cheats can be saved to disk or entered again at a later date.

PROGRAM SAVE
Freeze your program at any point and save entire contents of memory, including extended memory, to floppy or hardrive. When you reload the program it will resume at the point it was frozen. Ideal for saving a game at a difficult point or for programs with tedious 'password' loading systems.

SCREEN GRABBER
At the press of the Action Replay freezer button you can grab a standard VGA screen from any [illegible] and save it out as a standard PCX file suitable for your graphics package.

SLO MO FUNCTION
Allows you to play a game at your own pace. Select from about 10% to full speed.

MONITOR FEATURE
Display the entire contents of [illegible] frozen state. View as HEX or [illegible] facility. Output to printer available.

VIRUS CHECKER
[illegible]

FREEZER DOS COMMANDS
[illegible]

POWERFUL HARDWARE
Action Replay is a powerful plug-in card with both advanced program freezer circuitry and over 1MB of its own on board Ram so it uses less than 1K of the PCs own memory!

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[illegible]

System requirements
[illegible] 286/386/486 DOS 3.2 and above

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THESE 'BOTS WERE MADE FOR WALKING

With *MechWarrior 2: The Clans*, Activision brings high-tech pizazz to yet another classic title.

TRENT C. WARD

Get ready to climb into the cockpit of the most powerful war machines ever constructed! After many long months of development — and anticipation — *MechWarrior 2: The Clans*, **Activision**'s simulation of futuristic battles and clashing metal monsters, is finally here. With it, you'll enter into a dark future and prepare to do battle behind the controls of a massive, yet finely honed, fighting engine.

Based on the now-famous board game BattleTech from FASA Corporation, *MechWarrior 2* is more than just another simulator — it's a gateway into another world. Activision went to great lengths to ensure this title would fit securely into the

FASA: Fathers of the 'Mechs

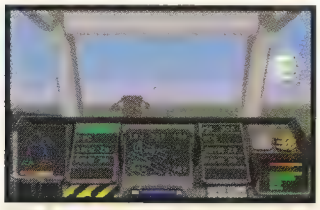
With the release of *Mechwarrior 2*, players will be introduced to a universe created by FASA corporation in their hit board game BattleTech. Originally released in 1984, this strange world of hulking BattleMechs, fierce warlords, and grim mercenaries has grown from a small board game called Battledroids into a major industry, complete with its own role-playing game, a line of miniatures, 22 published novels, and even more surprises on the way! Throughout it all, the basic

expansive BattleTech universe by staying in constant contact with FASA during the production. Working together, the

ASSAULT 'MECHS
GARGOYLE PRIMARY CONFIG
GARGOYLE ALT CONFIG A
GARGOYLE ALT CONFIG B
GARGOYLE ALT CONFIG C
MARHAMMER IIC PRIMARY CONFIG
MARHAMMER IIC ALT CONFIG A
MARHAWK PRIMARY CONFIG
MARHAWK ALT CONFIG A
MARHAWK ALT CONFIG B
MARHAWK ALT CONFIG C
MARAUDER IIC PRIMARY CONFIG
MARAUDER IIC ALT CONFIG A
EXECUTIONER PRIMARY CONFIG
EXECUTIONER ALT CONFIG A
EXECUTIONER ALT CONFIG B
EXECUTIONER ALT CONFIG C
EXECUTIONER ALT CONFIG D
DIRE WOLF PRIMARY CONFIG
DIRE WOLF ALT CONFIG A
DIRE WOLF ALT CONFIG B

The 'Mech selection screen lets you choose from over 15 different bots.

companies made sure that all the Clans, BattleMechs (more affectionately known as 'Mechs) and game mechanics of *MechWarrior 2* would act just as they do in the board games.



Here's your perspective of the action. The BattleMech's computers keep you notified of changes in direction, ammunition supplies, and current heat levels.

To even further ensure full graphic accuracy on the battleground, Activision modeled their 3-D images on the lead miniatures used in the board game. The cooperation be-

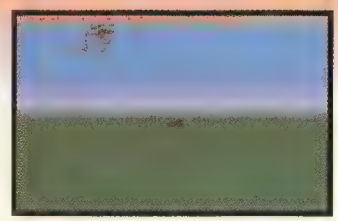
Good shooting! That's one less enemy to worry about.

tween the two teams shows in the final product, and this game is sure to keep die-hard BattleTech fans happy with both action and storyline.

Just as in BattleTech, *MechWarrior 2* takes place in the thirty-first century, during a time of constant warfare. The Earth and hundreds of other planets are part of the Inner Sphere, an area of space ruled by competing Houses, which are sort of the futuristic versions of medieval kingdoms. Having spent centuries fighting with each other, the Houses are currently confronted with a new threat...the Clans. Descendants of MechWarriors—soldiers from various planets who fled the Inner Sphere centuries ago — the Clans are unlike any enemy the Houses have ever faced before. Armed with the vastly superior OmniMech technology and an almost religious zeal for battle, The Clans have returned from their self-imposed exile as conquerors. Routing the House's forces time and again, the Clans now control a good sized area of the Inner Sphere, and stand poised to get the rest.

Now, a 15-year truce has been made between the Clans and Houses, and many of the Houses are using this period to gear up for the largest war the universe has ever seen. Honor-bound not to attack the Houses, the Clans have begun to fight amongst themselves, each determined to implement its own vision of the future.

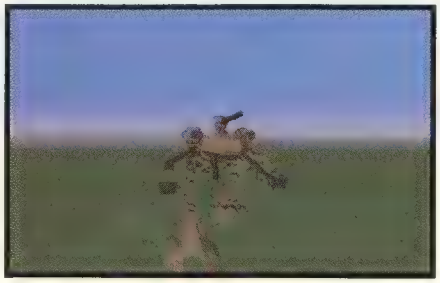
This is the world you enter at the start of the game — a world where a powerful young warrior like yourself can rise through the ranks quickly, using the power of the 'Mech — two-legged robots controlled by a human pilot, similar to the Walkers in *The Empire Strikes Back* — to



Firing your jump jets can get you out of messy situations. Just be sure to keep an eye on your heat gauge.

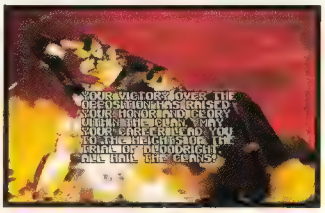
crush anyone who stands in the way.

But enough history — now it's time to take one of these babies for a stroll of de-



It's easy to keep up with the action, thanks to tracking and independent outside views.

struction! Impatient gamers can use the "Instant Action" option in the main hall to jump



Winning a battle will bring you honor, and may increase your standing within the Clan.

directly into the pre-battle area. From here, you'll be able to select BattleMechs for yourself, up to four teammates, and as many as five opponents,

In the construction facility, you can tailor a 'Mech to perfectly fit your needs.

with any mix of human- and computer-controlled 'Mechs that you like. The BattleMechs come in four different sizes, varying from light 'Mechs (up to 40 tons) to the immense assault 'Mechs, which can weigh in at well over 100 tons.

Selecting the right 'Mech for a job is an important part of the strategy of this game. For the first time out, I recommend the mammoth Marauder II C, which packs plenty of protection and firepower without sacrificing too much in the way of speed. Other options that can be selected from the pre-battle screen are weather conditions, terrain, number of opponents and their skill, gravity of the planet, and the even the planet itself, but beginners are probably best off leaving these variables alone until they're more comfortable with the controls.

Although there are enough buttons and gauges in the 'Mech's cockpit to keep simulation fans drooling, load 'n' go players can get by with just a few simple controls. The first step is to get the 'Mech moving. Like a lot of flight simulators, the top row of numbers on the keyboard controls the speed of your BattleMech. Once you build up a little speed, move the joystick left and right to get a feel for the way the your 'Mech responds.

When you've got your bearings, it's time to track down some enemies. Double green arrows on either side of your compass clue you in to the whereabouts of your next target; by turning in the direction of the arrows, you'll locate your prey in no time. Once you've got an opposing 'Mech

BattleTech set still remains one of the most popular war games available.

Though all of the books and charts may seem intimidating, the basics of the BattleTech board game are easy to follow. Players control immense humanoid fighting machines called BattleMechs, or 'Mechs for short. These powerful war machines are armed with the most destructive technology the 31st century has to offer, from huge particle cannons to missiles that streak across the battlefield with deadly accuracy. Players can choose to fight in one of the many 'Mechs included in the game, or build their own, following guidelines set down in the manual.

Like most board war-games, game play is turn-based, with distinct movement and firing phases. Taking too much damage can quickly reduce your 'Mech's ability to defend itself, while firing too

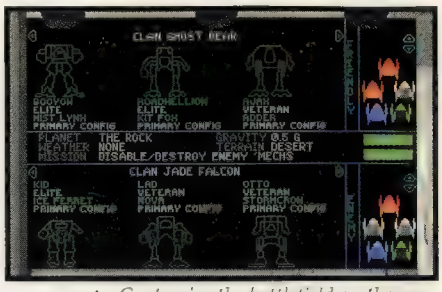
in your sights, simply squeeze the trigger for mass destruction. If you manage to destroy your foe(s), you'll have some time to look around unmolested, as well as practice more complex actions like turning your torso one way while walking another, throwing your 'Mech into reverse to keep the business end of your guns pointed at the enemy, and — if your 'Mech's got 'em — firing off jump jets to send you soaring over the battlefield.

MechWarrior is more than just a simple shoot-em-up, especially in battles involving more than one enemy. Players who simply run after the nearest foe and start blasting away will quickly find themselves memorizing the defeat sequences. Perhaps the most crucial factor in staying alive to fight another day is careful heat management. Firing your weapons or jump jets builds up heat, as will putting an extended strain on your engines — and when a 'Mech builds up too much heat it shuts down, making you a *very* large sitting duck. Though you're given an option to override the shutdown sequence, doing so will almost always result in the destruction of your 'Mech. The best strategy is to keep a low, steady speed unless you're in pursuit, and only fire the big guns when you're sure they're going to connect.

Hard-core sim fans will love *MechWarrior 2*'s career mode. Choose from one of six different Clans, each with their own history and agenda for conquest. As a MechWarrior, you've been genetically engineered to be worthy of representing your Clan in battle. As you play,

Receive mission briefings and detailed BattleMech info here in the Clan library.

you'll be assigned missions appropriate to your skill level and past accomplishments. If you're good enough, you may be promoted in order to better



Customize the battlefield on the pre-battle screens.

serve the Clan. The best of the best earn medals, and perhaps even win the honor of having their genes put into the Clans gene pool to pass their skills

After a victory, head to your living quarters to review medals and promotions.

on to future warriors. For the losers, there is only death or, even worse, dishonor. With the different Clan archetypes, and multiple missions, the career mode can make each game a unique experience.

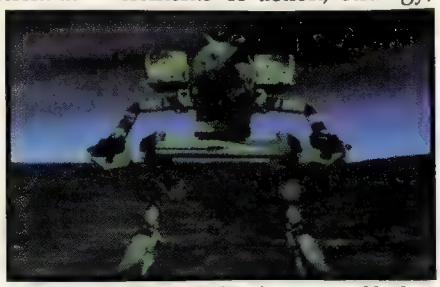
Crafty computer opponents often take cover behind available structures.

Once you're proficient at controlling a 'Mech, you'll want to personalize the game by creating your own BattleMechs in the construction plant. You have complete control in the design process, choosing total tonnage, engine type, amount and placement of armor, types of weapons, and more. All of the rules in *MechWarrior* 2's design plant mirror those of BattleTech, and there's even a feature that creates an ASCII text file containing stats for your new BattleMech which are completely legal for use in the BattleTech board game.

If you think you're ready, it's time to take on the most foul and devious of all foes — your friends! Yep, Activision also added modem play, allowing you to hook via direct serial link or over the phone lines. There's nothing quite as exciting as going head-to-head against a friend, or teaming up to face opposing Clans as members of the same attack force. Since there really isn't too much info travelling by wire, the modem play is smooth and fairly fast.

As if all of this weren't enough, Activision plans to keep the action coming by releasing add-on disks for the game. The first add-on, which will include 17 new BattleMech designs, should appear on shelves shortly after *MechWarrior* 2's release. Activision also hinted that a prequel is being considered, giving you the chance to participate in the invasion of the Inner Sphere.

MechWarrior 2 is hot action any way you look at it. This game combines the best elements of action, strategy,

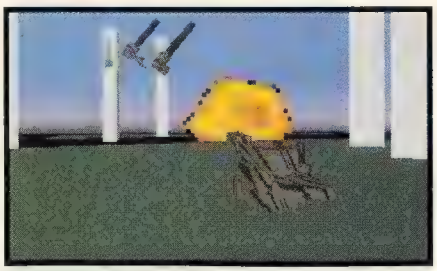


This Leviathan is more trouble than most opponents will want to face.

simulation, and role-playing into one bundle that will always have you on the edge of your seat. Activision's devotion to "getting it right" gives the game world a coherent feel,

If you opponent tries to run away, reward his cowardice with a back full of missiles!

without detracting in any way from the end product. And with the modem-play and add-on disks, they also make sure that this won't be a product that becomes dull after a few



Not only have you lost your 'Mech — you've dishonored the Clan. Don't expect a warm reception.

plays. From beginning to end, *MechWarrior* 2 is a complete winner.

often or running to much can overheat your machine. Careful combat strategy, combined with a knowledge of your machine's limitations, are necessary to assure victory.

If slugging it out on the plains isn't enough for you, then you'll want to grab the MechWarrior guide. MechWarrior expands the BattleTech universe even farther, by allowing players to role-play as technicians, MechWarriors, spies, and more. In the 31st century's world of strict caste systems and dwindling resources, a character's life can be just as dangerous off the battlefield as on. With MechWarrior, the history and planets documented in the novels become the playing field for the characters. Like most role-playing games, new adventures can be purchased in add-on modules, or created by the game-master. The possibilities are infinite, limited only by the player's imagination.

— Trent C. Ward

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Mallard

THE 1994 LAS VEGAS REPORT:

Winter CES

This year's Winter Consumer Electronics Show (CES) was a pretty mixed bag. Unlike the '93 Summer CES, real standout software seemed to be in short supply. That's not to say that there weren't some very good titles on display; it's just that not many of them managed to break loose from the pack.

We did notice a few trends, though, and the biggest was the growing number of game publishers moving toward CD-ROM as the delivery platform of choice. In fact, Interplay announced that all of its new titles will be CD-ROM, and most of the big-name publishers were showing CD-only titles or enhanced CD versions of floppy-disk games. CD-ROM offers developers the advantage of massive storage space, and thus an opportunity to create bigger, more ambitious titles than they could attempt before. And it costs less to release a game on CD than it does to release it on floppy disks. So if you don't have a CD-ROM drive yet, you better start shopping. The way it's looking now, we figure at least half of all the new titles released by this time next year will be CD-ROM games.

Another trend, and one that seems directly related to the growth of CD-ROM, was the emphasis a number of developers are placing on big, impressive intro scenes and animated interludes. Because CD-ROM gives them the space to do it, designers are creating some stunning computer artwork to spruce up their games. 3D-modeled spacecraft, full-motion video, and Disneyesque cartoon sequences were everywhere — even floppy-based titles seemed to have more pre-game flash than usual. While all the hot new visuals are pretty, let's hope they weren't created at the expense of the games themselves, as has sometimes been the case.

Of course, a lot of the stuff we see at CES isn't even finished yet. Once all those designers and developers work their magic and the games are ready for release, you can bet that dozens of them will stand out as *very* impressive indeed.

Now, on with the games!

Accolade: Accolade showed an early version of *Rise of the Robots*, an impressive new fighting game developed by Mirage Technologies Multi-Media. Play against a friend or the computer as you control 3D-modeled robots in head-to-head action. Should be ready in March.

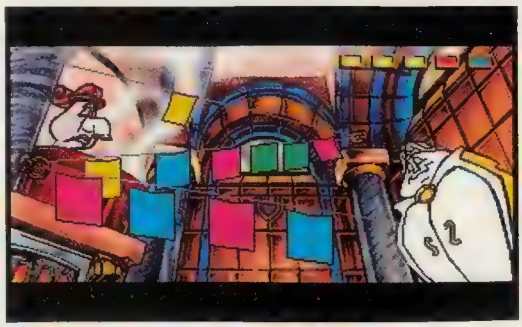
Also showing were *Barkley: Shut Up and Jam!* and *Brett Hull Hockey*, both released under Accolade's new Sport Accolade line of sports sims. *Barkley* (3rd Quarter '94) is a street-basketball slamfest, with no refs or rules to get in the way of the action. *Brett Hull Hockey* (2nd Quarter '94) boasts an NHLPA license, so all your favorite players will be in attendance.

Avalon Hill Games: If you've been reading *PC Entertainment* for the last few months, you know that military board-game giant Avalon Hill is back in the PC game publishing business. In addition to showing *Third Reich* and *Crusader* (see "The Desktop General", p. 22), The Hill announced a whole slew of new releases.

First up will be *Advanced Civilization*, available in April. Don't confuse this one with *Sid Meier's Civilization*; it's based on the original Avalon Hill board game.

A game of 15th-Century English intrigue, *Kingmaker* will be ready sometime this spring. Then in June, watch for *Fifth Fleet*, followed by *Blackbeard* in August and *Squad Leader* in the fall.

Bethesda Softworks: The company that brought us *Wayne Gretzky Hockey 3*, *The Terminator: 2029* and *The Terminator: Rampage* (reviewed in this issue — p. 68) was drawing crowds to see *Delta V*, a polygon-filled shooter/sim that should be on the shelves by the time you read this. The other titles on display — *The Elder Scrolls: Arena*, a first-person RPG; and *NCAA: Road To the Final Four* — should also be ready.

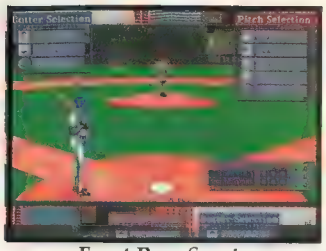


Beauty and the Beast

Capstone: Capstone's big news was that it had signed an agreement with Id Software to use the popular *Wolfenstein 3D* engine — and the result is *Corridor 7*. *Corridor 7* takes place in the year 2012, and casts you as the last survivor of an alien invasion. You'll blast your way through 30 levels of fast-forward action — look for it in April.

Capstone also showed *Cartoon Maker*, a drawing and productivity package, which has just begun shipping.

CH Products: The company behind the critically acclaimed Flightstick Pro announced the new Jetstick. Intended as an entry-level joystick, the Jetstick



Front Page Sports

will begin shipping first-quarter '94. And later in the year, CH will be rolling out rudder pedals and a throttle. We'll keep you posted....

Disney Software: Disney showed us one title that *really* made an impression; we're just not sure what kind of an impression. It's called *Wolf*, and it's a wolf simulation. Yes, I mean a real, canine-type wolf! You play as one of several wolves, and you'll have to fight for your place in the pack, hunt for food with your packmates, mark your own territory, and even struggle to become the leader of a pack and earn the right to breed. The game looked very nice, and seems to be a pretty comprehensive examination of the wolf's complex social structure. Whether or not there's a big market for wolf sims remains to be seen, but we're *definitely* looking forward to playing it!

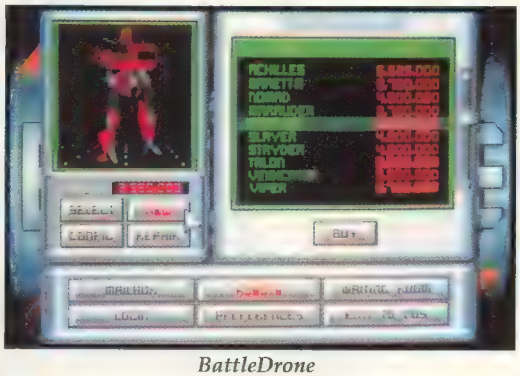
Disney also showed *Beauty and The Beast*, an edutainment program aimed at younger players.

Dynamix: If you're a subscriber to Sierra's Imagination Network, *Battledrome* will be of special interest to you. This *Mechwarrior*-like fighting sim puts you in control of huge robot fighters, called Hercs. It'll be available first as a stand-alone PC title, and will support modem play. But next, Dynamix will be taking *Battledrome* on-line with the Imagination Network, for some *real* 'bot-stomping fun. Looks pretty mighty!

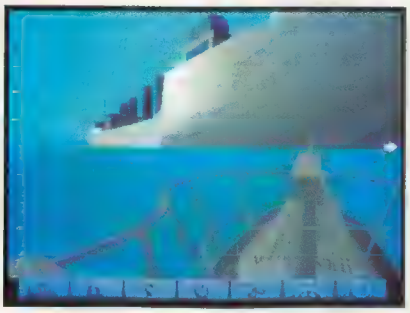
Also on the way is *Front Page Sports: Baseball* — and if it does for computer baseball what the Front Page Sports games have done for football, there'll be some *very* happy gamers out there. Shipping this summer!

Finally, *Aces of the Deep* (which we saw at last year's Summer CES as *Graue Wolfe*) is just about ready and looking very hot. This WWII submarine sim should earn plenty of praise, and a dedicated following.

Ebook: Ebook has almost exclusively published classic books on CD-ROM — until now. Trivia buffs will want to check out *Trivia: The Multimedia Game Vol. I*, which uses digitized photos, sound bites, video clips, and more to test the knowledge of up to six players or teams. *Trivia* is slated for an early March release.


BattleDrone

Electronic Arts: Mega-gaming conglomerate EA seems to be concentrating on its affiliated label partners, because there wasn't much actual EA product at the show. In fact, only one title was really developed by EA — but it looked pretty impressive.


Aces of the Deep

Noctropolis, shipping in March, had the gritty look of a good graphic-novel. You play as the owner of a comic-book shop, somehow sucked into the pages of one of the comics to play as Darksheer, your favorite superhero.

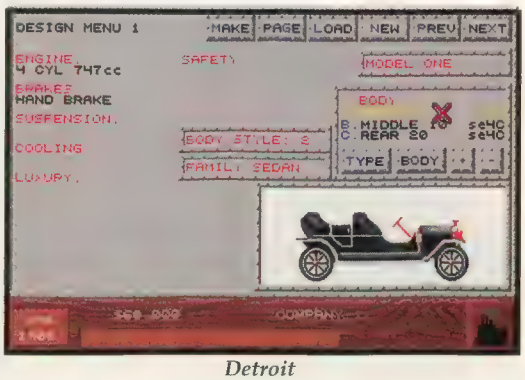
EA will also publish the latest game from UK-based Bullfrog (remember *Populous* and *Syndicate*?) Productions. This one's called *Theme Park*, and it's a kind of Sim-Six Flags. You have to build a profitable theme park to please all those little people.

Hi Tech Expressions: Hi Tech Expressions has formed a new division, UltraTech, to distribute all its 3rd-party releases. Most of the UltraTech titles will be PC versions of Acclaim's videogame hits, including *Krusty's Fun House*, *T2: The Arcade Game*, and *Mortal Kombat*. And although it's shipped already, *Mortal Kombat* is worth mentioning as one of the best games we saw at the show. A big improvement over *Street Fighter II*!

Impressions: Impressions is going to be pretty busy in the first half of the year, with five PC releases by June.

First up is *Detroit*, a business simulation in the tradition of *Air Bucks*. You'll play as president of your own Detroit auto company, managing the books, developing new cars — and trying to put the other guys out of business! Ships in February.

In March comes *Breach 3*, the latest in the popular Breach series of futuristic squad-level combat games. Then in April, look for *Classic Solitaire for Windows* (self-explanatory); and *D-Day: The Beginning of the End*, the latest Micro Miniatures game. And in June, Impressions will serve up *Castle Conquest*, a strategy game set in 13th Century England.



Detroit

Noctropolis

I-Motion: Considering the enormous success of *Alone in the Dark*, it's no surprise that I-Motion is ready to serve up a sequel. In *Alone in the Dark 2*, private detective Edward Carnby must rescue a kidnapped child from the evil One-Eyed Jack and his miscreant band of smugglers and pirates. It looks even better than the original, and it'll be out sometime in the first quarter of this year.

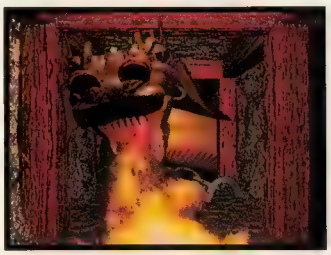
Interplay: Interplay was showing one of the best-looking games of the show, *Star Trek: Starfleet Academy*. While it was only a demo, the animation in the few scenes we saw was simply dazzling. In the final version, you'll take command of three different classes of Federation vessels in missions ranging from diplomacy to war. Watch for it to hit the shelves later this summer.

In fact, Interplay was one of the busiest companies at the show, with scads of releases scheduled throughout the year. *Stonekeep*, the long-awaited 3D dungeon adventure, should be out sometime

in the first quarter of this year. *Star Reach*, a game of interplanetary conquest, will also ship in the first quarter. *Dungeon Master II*: The Legend of Skullkeep will be shipping soon, too.

Breach 3

Interplay also announced agreements with Maxis to do enhanced CD-ROM versions of *Sim City* and *Sim Ant*, and with Philips Media to do three CD-I titles on DOS CD-ROM: *Zombie Dinos from the Planet Zeltoid*, *Voyeur* (starring Robert Culp), and *Caesars World of Gambling*.

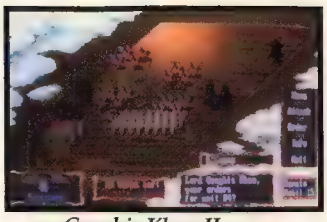

Stonekeep

Koei: The company that introduced us all to feudal China is back, with a new and improved look. *Genghis Khan II*, shipping in February, takes us once again into the power-hungry world of that infamous Mongol ruler. And in a change of pace, Koei is working on a non-asiatic title called *Celtic Tales: Balor of the Evil Eye*. This one takes us to a fictional land of wizards, druids, and Celtic clans, and should be ready in April.

The Learning Company: The Learning Company didn't have anything new, but did announce Windows versions of both *Math Rabbit* and *Reader Rabbit*. Also, *Super Solvers Spellbound!* and *The Student Writing Center* will be making the move to CD-ROM.

LucasArts: Lucasarts' hot new sequel to *X-Wing* was another of the show's most impressive titles. *TIE Fighter* looked even better than *X-Wing*, and should please everyone who's been waiting for the chance to play on Darth's side for a change. Coming this spring!

A CD-ROM version of *Sam & Max Hit the Road* — with that great Lucasarts voice-acting — will be ready soon, too, as will a pretty neat non-game, *Star Wars Screen Saver*. It'll be the end of the year, though (maybe even 1995), before we see Steven Spielberg's *The Dig*. Lucasarts was only showing a videotape, and it wasn't very far along.


Genghis Khan II

Luminaria: This brand-new company, whose titles will be distrib-

ACCESS Brings You a Virtual World Interactive Movie!

What Reviewers are Saying :

"Lots of games claim to be pushing the envelope—*Under a Killing Moon* blows it to **smithereens!** "
—William Trotter, *PC Entertainment*

"*Under a Killing Moon*...the **most elaborate** graphic adventure to date. A ground breaking CD adventure!"
—Joyce Worley, *Electronic Games*

"*Under a Killing Moon* combines the best elements of movies and computer games and creates an amazing interactive experience that's **better than either of them** . It literally pulls you into the screen."
—Denny Atkin, Entertainment Editor, *Compute Magazine*

This category-creating Interactive Movie from ACCESS Software goes light years beyond any other product labeled "interactive." *Under a Killing Moon* takes you to the streets of post World War III San Francisco and casts you into the role of Tex Murphy, Private Investigator, who first appeared in *Mean Streets*, then *Martian Memorandum*. *Under a Killing Moon* is a Virtual World full of people and places so richly detailed, you'll feel like you're actually there.

Wrath of the Gods

uted by Maxis, debuted with the ambitious CD-ROM title *Wrath of the Gods*. Featuring digitized video of 60 actors in full Grecian garb and a game-play time of over 40 hours, *Wrath* will be ready in March.

Mallard: Mallard has built it's reputation on accessory disks for the *Microsoft Flight Simulator* series. Now the company is adding to its product list, and even creating Quakers, a new line of non-sim products. The first Quakers title will be *Fast Action Paq: The First Challenge*, a Windows-based arcade package.

The non Quakers stuff includes *Warpoint*, a space sim set in the year 2049, scheduled for a June release; *G-Nome*, a sci-fi adventure game set in the 22nd century, will be ready in October; and *Space Clipper*, a combination space sim/adventure game, should be ready by the fall of this year.

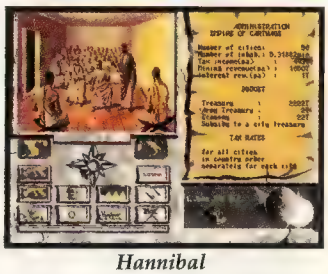
Maxis: Other than the very impressive new *Sim City 2000*, the developers at Maxis have been pretty quiet. Maxis' first releases of the year will be home productivity and creativity titles. But you know a hot new Sim Something is in the works...

Merit: Merit seems to be making the move into big-league productions, if the demo of *Harvester* is any indication. This *very* stylized, violent, and disturbing horror title looked quite impressive, with lots of 3D-modeled backgrounds and creepy imagery. Gilbert Austin, who

Alien Breed

wrote *Wing Commander II*, *Privateer*, and *Strike Commander*, is the creative force behind *Harvester*. Look for it sometime later this year.

MicroLeague: The first in MicroLeague's "Utilitainment" series, *Time Out Sports Baseball*, will be ready this April, followed by *Time Out Sports Baseball* in June. And what *is* "utilitainment?" Well, it's a package that combines a



Hannibal

basic sports game, a screen saver, and a personal planner. For Windows, of course....

MicroLeague is also rolling out *Blood Bowl*, a PC version of the popular board game, as well as graphic adventures *Bazooka Sue* and *Hoogy*. And watch for MicroLeague's new line of low-cost games, sold under the General Admission name.

UNDER A

Killing Moon

Q: What do film stars *Brian Keith*, *Margot Kidder*, & *Russell Means* all have in common?

A: They all star in ACCESS Software's new CD thriller *Under a Killing Moon!*

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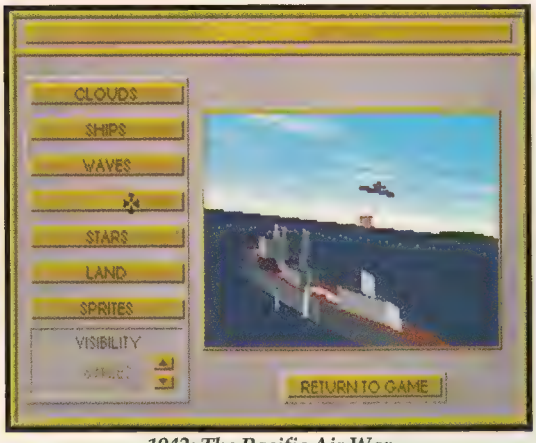
ACCESS SOFTWARE INCORPORATED

THE 1994 LAS VEGAS REPORT: Winter CES

MicroProse: MicroProse was showing one product that really made us sit up and take notice. If the demo we saw is any indication of what the frame-rate and graphics quality will be in the finished product, *1942: The Pacific Air War* might be the best-looking flight sim we've seen yet. Players can pilot any of ten American and Japanese planes through hundreds of historically based missions, and experience added realism with the game's virtual cockpit. Slated for a spring release.

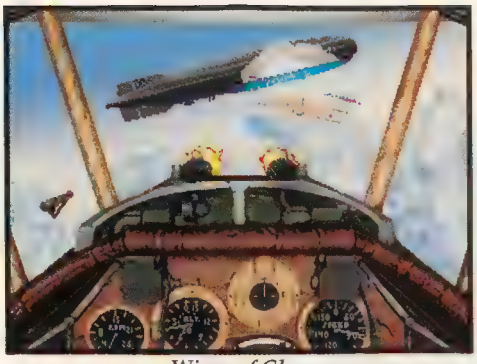


1942: The Pacific Air War

There's plenty more MicroProse on the way, too: *Fields of Glory: The Road to Waterloo*, a miniature-style military strategy game, lets you relive Napoleon's most famous battle; *Dragonsphere*, a graphic adventure set in those crazy medieval times, will be out very soon; *Across the Rhine* (release: this spring), although still in early development, looked like it could be a great WWII tank sim; and *F-14 Fleet Defender*, a Tomcat simulation, should be out very soon.

Mindcraft: This EA affiliate had a broad variety of titles on display, perhaps the most ambitious of which was *CyberGO*, created by Bruce Wilcox (one of only two GO masters in the U.S.). *CyberGo*, which Mindcraft claims has the most advanced AI of any GO title, combines cyberpunk imagery with traditional game play. It should be on shelves by the time you read this.

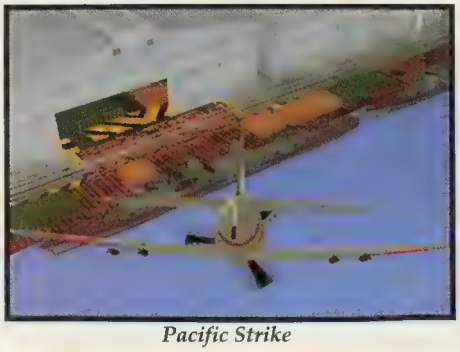
Mechamander (Spring 1994) puts you in control of an interplanetary mining operation, but there's a lot more involved than just landing on a planet and setting up shop. You'll be challenged by computer-controlled competitors, each with a unique personality and armed to the teeth, ready to stake out their own claims. In *Dominion*, the latest entry in the fantasy/strategy market, you live the life of a young king struggling to gain control on one of several continents. Though you can control all parts of your kingdom directly, you also have intelligent Ministers at your disposal who can handle many affairs independently. Both *Mechamander* and *Dominion* should be ready by the time this issue hits newsstands.


Wings of Glory

Mission Studios: This new company is made up of former Velocity employees, and its first title, *Battlecruiser 3000AD*, will be ready in Marc. A 3D space adventure with flight simulator, wargame, and resource management elements, *Battlecruiser 3000AD* should turn a few heads. Mission Studios will also do *Jetfighter III*, the third in the Jetfighter series.

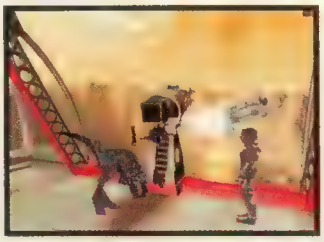
Morgan Interactive: *Morgan's Trivia Madness* (February) is a multiple-choice quiz game spiced with gags, animations, and music. One or two players can play, with selectable difficulty levels so children of different ages can compete on an equal basis. *Recess in Greece* takes kids on a trip through time to ancient Greece and the City of Troy. Games, puzzles, and activities are used to show how ancient Greek culture has influenced our world.

New World Computing: New World was showing one of the more innovative uses of the fast-forward *Wolfenstein 3D*-style games that seem to be popping up everywhere. Called *Zephyr*, it puts you in the cockpit of a futuristic hovertank, and allows independent turret control. June of '94 New World's other titles include *Inherit The Earth*, a graphic adventure with talking animals (March); and *Heroes of Might and Magic*, a *King's Bounty* repackaging starring all your favorite Might and Magic characters.


Pacific Strike

NovaLogic: *Armored Fist*, the long-awaited tank simulation that uses the Voxel Space technology that gave *Comanche* its ultra-realistic look, should be ready this February. Playing as American or Russian, you can control up to four tank platoons, man the guns in an individual tank, and call in air or artillery support.

Origin: Big things are cookin' down in Austin. Scheduled for release sometime during the first quarter of 1994, *Ultima VIII: Pagan* is the first Ultima not set in Brittania. *Pagan* features a new viewing perspective, larger characters, more objects to manipulate, and four-channel digitized sound for multiple sound effects. And guess what — *Pagan* is *compatible* with memory-management programs!


BioForge

Hot on its heels will come *Pacific Strike*, a simulation/adventure in which your aerial skills can change the course of history. You get to fly eight aircraft, including the Wildcat, Corsair, Hellcat, Devastator, Dauntless, and Helldiver. Each plane has a virtual cockpit for independent head movement, and a Speech Accessory Pack will add radio chatter during missions.

You can fly for the British and Americans (if you survive that long) in *Wings of Glory 1917-1918*. See how you handle the Sopwith Pup, Sopwith Camel, SE-5A, Spad XIII, and

Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea.

1942
THE PACIFIC AIR WAR™

THEY WERE DESPERATE, DARING AND DEADLY!

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Taking on the same challenges that World War II fighter pilots faced, your tour of duty includes some of the most heroic battles ever fought. Battles that will have you chasing down Wildcats, Corsairs, and Zeros in death-defying dogfights. Performing high-speed dives upon heavily defended carriers. And pushing your skills to the limit as you master WW II air combat in an innovative virtual cockpit.

The outcome of the war in the Pacific turns upon your actions. Your task force is depending on you. And the skies are yours to control in ***1942, The Pacific Air War***.

CHALLENGE the enemy at the battles of Coral Sea, Midway, Eastern Solomons, Santa Cruz, and the Philippine Sea!

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SWEAT over the comprehensive strategy for all naval forces!

EXPERIENCE the thrill of head-to-head dogfights with a friend via modem connection.

MICROPROSE

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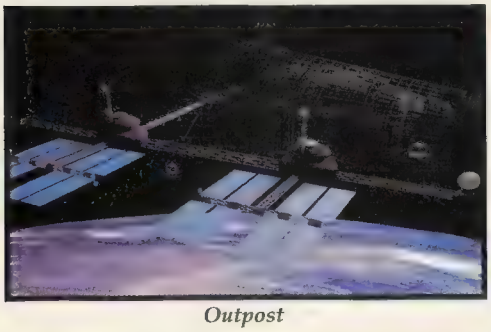
THE 1994 LAS VEGAS REPORT: Winter CES

Fokker Dr. I (do you get captured and fly this one back to friendly lines?).

BioForge, which kicks off Origin's Interactive Movie line, has a similarly vague release date ("the first part of 1994"). You play as Lex, who awakens from an operation with total amnesia and a body that half-man and half-machine. Multiple camera angles, cutaway scenes, and an action-sensitive soundtrack will be used to create a cinematic experience; it reminded us of a futuristic *Alone in the Dark*. Set on a space station in the 21st century, *System Shock* (Spring) features an enhanced *Ultima Underworld* engine and a storyline that pits you against robotic sentries and genetic monsters as you race to save the world from a very naughty computer system.

Psygnosis: The big title was *Microcosm*, a CD-ROM title that sends you on a fantastic voyage through the human body, looking for a deadly droid. It should be on shelves now.



Outpost

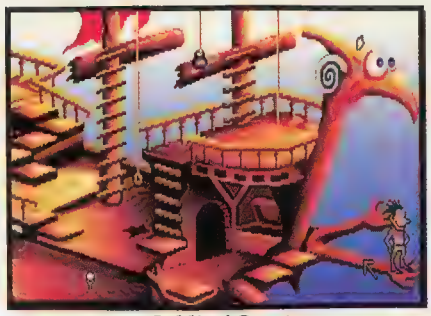
Sanctuary Woods: Children can learn the meaning of more than 800 words in English, Spanish, and French with *Sitting on the Farm*, which also includes a feature that lets kids record their voice as they sing along to a variety of musical instruments. It's due out in February.

It'll be interesting to see how *Dennis Miller's That's News to Me* (currently available) and *Dennis Miller's That's Geek to Me* (March) fare. The first title is a collection of jokes based on the headlines of 1993, while the second is Miller's computer glossary for the "technically challenged." Two questions: Are there that many Dennis Miller fans/CD-ROM owners? And when's the Howard Stern CD-ROM coming out?

Sierra: Sierra had one of the most impressive CD-ROM titles at the show. *Outpost* is a strategy game of space colonization, set 50 years in the future. Using official NASA projections and research, you'll build a space station and eventually travel to a new planet and attempt to establish a colony there. Lots of very good 3D-modeled animation, and a good, solid strategy game to tie it all together. Watch for it in March.

Sierra also showed *Inca II* and *Goblins Quest* (AKA *Gobliins 3*) from French subsidiary Coktel.

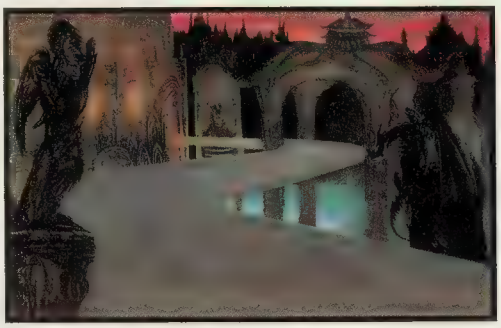
Spectrum Holobyte: Trekkers will be glad to here that Spectrum's CD-ROM title *Star Trek: The Next Generation* will be ready this spring. Subtitled "A Final Unity," the game will take you on a mission to preserve the integrity of the galaxy itself. You'll experience the thrill of commanding the *Enterprise* -D, as well as some planetside adventure as you lead the away team.



Goblins' Quest

Spectrum also introduced the first in its *Wild Blue Yonder* series, an infotainment CD-ROM product detailing the history of flight. The first entry is dedicated to the P-51D.

SSI: Players will have 100 ship types and 20 planes at their disposal in *Great Naval Battles, Volume II: Guadalcanal, 1942-1943* (February). *Guadalcanal*, the first SSI game to feature SVGA graphics, will include five tactical battles, three carrier-based battles, and two campaigns.



Star Trek: The Next Generation

Fantasy role-playing fans can look forward to a new game world with *Ravenloft: Strahd's Possession*, slated to ship on CD-ROM (March) and on floppy disks (April). This 2nd Edition AD&D title, which utilizes 320 x 400 x 256 VGA, includes 30 authentic creatures from the Ravenloft game world, and features over 60 mage and Priest spells. Another 2nd Edition AD&D game from SSI is *Al-Qadim: The Genie's Curse*, an interesting mix of arcade-style combat, magic-based puzzles, and a story right out of the Arabian Nights. Like *Strahd's Possession*, *Genie's Curse* will ship on CD-ROM (March) and floppies (April).

Perhaps the most unique game SSI displayed was *Dark Legions*, best described as a *very* complex *Archon Ultra*. Equal emphasis is placed on strategy and action, and modem- and network-play options look to give this one a lot of replayability. *Dark Legions* will be released on CD-ROM and floppies around the same time as *Genie's Curse* and *Strahd's Possession*.

Suncom: The joystick giant showed a new flight control stick, the FlightMAX. The stick will let you control both rudder and throttle functions, and customize button functions.

Tsunami: Tsunami will be releasing *Ringworld 2: Within A.R.M.s Reach* on CD-ROM, and what we saw of it looked very nice. Look for it later this year.

Virgin Games: The sequel to the CD-ROM blockbuster *The 7th Guest* will be ready this spring. *11th Hour* looked even better than the original, with an enormous color palette and some remarkable backgrounds.

Virgin also showed *H.A.W.C.: Helicopter Aquatic Warfare Command*, which the company hopes will be one of the most realistic helicopter sims to date. Shipping this spring, *H.A.W.C* puts you on the trail of smugglers in the Singapore Straight.

And finally, *D-Day: Operation Overlord* is Virgin's new WWII flight sim recreating the battle for air superiority before and during the invasion of Normandy.

The Eleventh Hour

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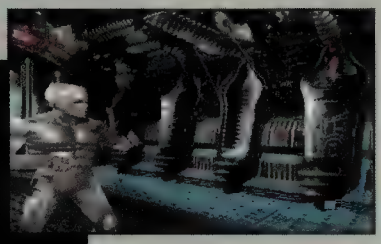

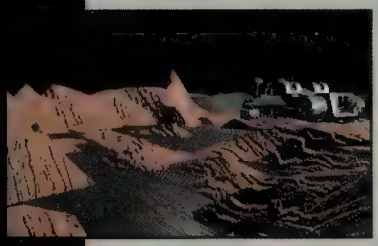

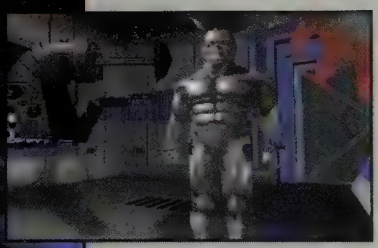

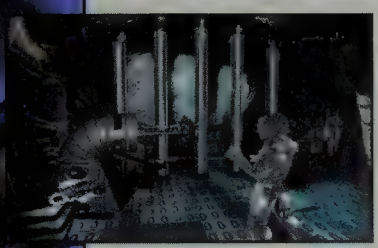

Actual screens may vary.

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INDYCAR RACING

Category: Racing Simulation

Developer: Papyrus Publishing

Publisher: Papyrus Publishing, 35 Medford St., Somerville, MA 02143

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386 DX/25 MHZ	486SX/20 or faster
4MB RAM	Supported sound cards
DOS 3.3 or higher	Wheel or flight yoke
VGA	
15MB hard-drive space	

LEE BUCHANAN

Stop whatever you're doing. Yeah, that's right, even if it means putting this magazine down — you can read it later. If you're a race fan — and I know you are — go to the software store now and buy *IndyCar Racing* from Papyrus.

Back already? Good. Now you can finish this review while you're loading *IndyCar Racing*, the computer simulation that racing fans have been dreaming about. Oh, and you might want to take a leave of absence from work or school so you can devote the next several weeks to mastering this very difficult, demanding — and *fun* — simulation.

IndyCar Racing looks great, sounds great, and feels great. This, computer gamers, is auto racing. When you're playing *IndyCar Racing*, it looks for all the world like the view you see from the onboard cameras during televised races — it's that good.

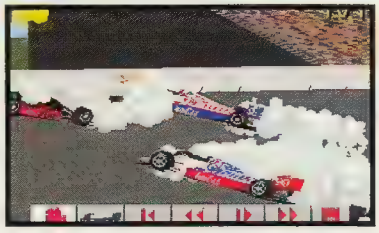
Make no mistake, *IndyCar Racing* is a simulation, not a game. Don't expect to hop into the cockpit and win the pole in qualifying. You'll spend hours in the garage and run hundreds of miles of practice laps on each track before you can be competitive in a race. The game has defaults car setups for track, but they aren't good enough if you hope to run up front.

Just like the real race teams, you'll find yourself tweaking tire pressures, wing settings, shocks, camber, stagger, and gears as you try to shave another couple of tenths of a second off your lap times. You'll become accustomed to the routine:

Change a wing setting, run a few laps, check the tire temperatures, adjust the pressure, run a few more laps. It's a time-consuming, laborious process, but that's racing — and a delight to any true race fan.

The replay feature is as good as you'll see in any simulation. Camera angles include in-car, chase, sky, blimp, and two "TV" angles that really bring the action back to life. Just watching the replays for sheer fun is a blast, but they're also an important tool as you search for the fastest way around the track. The blimp view, in particular, will show where you're missing the line and losing speed in the turns.

And for newcomers to the Indy circuit, there are so many options built into *IndyCar Racing* that anyone can be competitive right away. You can let the computer control braking and shifting as you get the feel of the game, and if you're tired of finishing near the back of the pack simply adjust the performance of the other cars, from 0 to 100%.

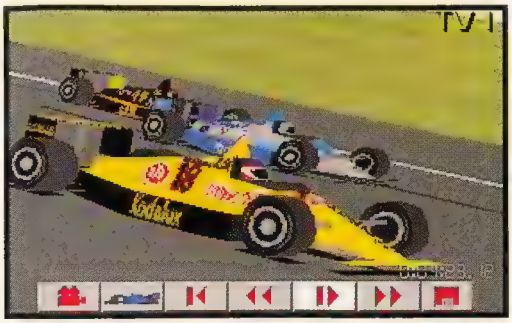


To get the most from *IndyCar*, you'll probably want to use a wheel or a yoke for control. The joystick routine is excellent, but this sim demands such precise control that a joystick just doesn't feel right. Other controls, such as throttle, braking and shifting, can be assigned to any keys you like.

Papyrus deserves loud applause for *IndyCar*'s utter devotion to realism. The drivers are authentic, and the car-paint schemes and decals are identical to their real-life counterparts. The behaviour of other drivers is especially impressive: Unlike the drivers in some other racing sims, these guys act like they know what they're doing. If you get out of shape in a corner, the other cars will do their best to avoid you; leave an opening, and the car behind you will make you pay.

The AI for the drivers, however, isn't quite as sharp when it comes to making pit stops — they almost never take advantage of caution periods. I've seen the entire field ignore the opportunity to pit during a yellow flag, then make pit stops five laps later when the green flag is out. It seems like they'll only pit when they're dangerously low on fuel.

The start of races and restarts after cautions present something of a problem. Most real-life IndyCar races start with cars two abreast, but in this sim they line up single file almost immediately. And the game doesn't warn you when



you're about to get the green flag, so you have to be ready each time you approach the start/finish line.

On some counts, *IndyCar Racing* might be a bit too realistic. In real life, slight contact between open-wheel race cars almost always sends cars into the wall -- and drivers to the hospital. That's accurately reflected in *IndyCar Racing*, and it makes the game a real challenge. Tap another car from behind or brush against a rival making a pass, and you're liable to wipe out yourself and anybody else running around you.

That level of realism may be asking a bit much of computer gamers looking for a vicarious thrill. After all, you're not actually in the car. I've taken a few green flags in a stock car, and on the track you're able to *sense* where other cars are around you. Since you don't have that sort of awareness in a simulation, controlling a race car in a computer game is, at least in some ways, more difficult than doing the real thing.

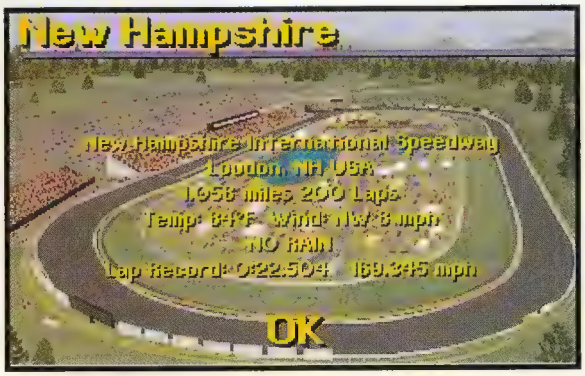
I can accept the fact that Papyrus has chosen to duplicate collisions accurately. But in one respect, the creators of *IndyCar Racing* have taken their admirable devotion to realism too far. Here's my single, screaming criticism: *You can't save a race in progress.*

Picture this: You go to Michigan fourth in points. After qualifying 14th, you've worked your way up to third. You're closing in on 13th place, running in heavy traffic at speeds well above 200 mph. Then the phone rings, so you pause the race. It's your mom, wanting to know why you never call.

You go back to the computer. You're an hour-and-a-half into the event, just past the halfway point in the 500-mile race. In that time you've painstakingly found your groove around the two-mile track. Now, press the "P" key — instantly you're hurtling into turn one at 210 mph, surrounded by cars on all sides. Chances are you're going to crash.

Come on, guys, at least give us the *option* to avoid this. There's just no reason to torture your customers by making players run an incredibly intense, three-hour race in one sitting. Sure, you can run a 50-lap race if you want, but that isn't realistic, and a short race robs the simulation of the pit strategy that is so critical in racing.

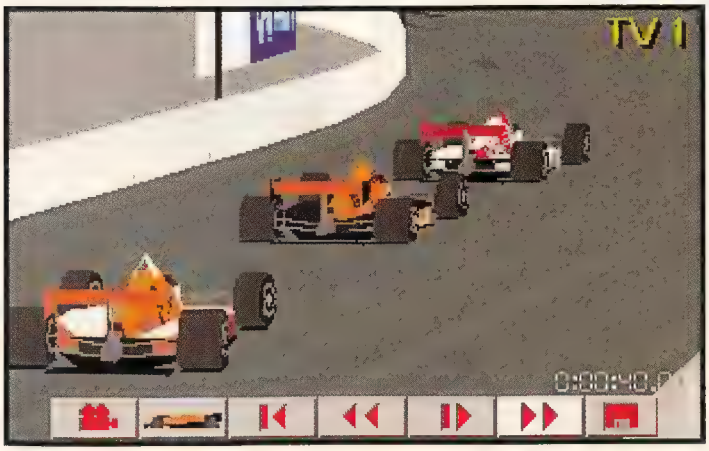
Another major omission lies in the resolution of a race after you've dropped out. After you crash (probably after restarting a paused game), your car just sits where it came to rest. If you can limp around to the pits, fine. But if you can't, you just sit there. If you're in the middle of the groove on a road course, that's too bad. The other cars will just have to find a way around you.



What's worse, there's no accelerated race feature to allow you to go quickly to final results. If you crash on the second lap of a 500-mile race (probably after restarting a paused game), you're best best is to go see a movie while the other guys finish the race.

The graphics are superb, and on a 486/33 with 8 megs of RAM, *IndyCar Racing* manages to deliver the sensation of speed with the graphic detail at its highest level. The tracks are gorgeous, with walls, grandstands and signs rendered with colorful accuracy.

The tracks in the game include four ovals (Michigan, Nazareth, New Hampshire, and Milwaukee), and four road courses (Long Beach, Laguna Seca, Portland and Toronto). What, no Indianapolis? It seems that Papyrus, even after its *Indy 500* sim of a few years ago, hasn't yet been awarded the rights to reproduce the Brickyard for this sim. But they're working on it, and hope to release add-on disks to eventually offer all the Indycar tracks.



This is one stunning achievement. With the baffling exception of not allowing you to save a race, *IndyCar Racing* is very nearly a perfect racing simulation. Now, how about a stock-car sim just like this one? If I can just put a bumper on Dale Earnhardt....

NOMAD

Category: Space Sci-Fi Adventure

Developer: Gametek

Publisher: Gametek, 2999 Northeast 191st Street, North Miami Beach, FL 33180

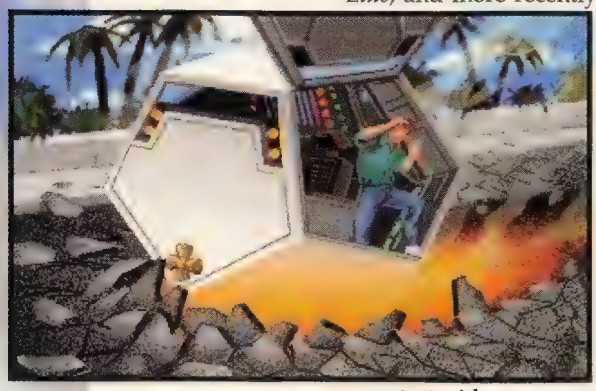
Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286 or better 3 MB RAM DOS 5 or higher 7 MB hard-drive space VGA or SVGA	386-25sx or higher AdLib, Disney Sound Source, Sound Blaster, or compatibles

ANDY PATRIZIO

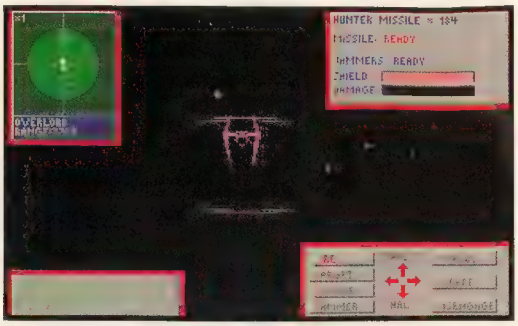
Over the past several years, Gametek's bread and butter has been its computer and video-game adaptations of television shows like *Jeopardy*, *Wheel of Fortune*, and *American Gladiators*. But apparently the company has been bitten by the spacefaring bug: Almost simultaneously it has released *Frontier*, the sequel to the classic space trading and combat game *Elite*, and *Nomad*, which could *almost* pass for a sequel to *Elite*.

Nomad puts you in the role of a fighter/trader in the middle of an interstellar war zone. Sound familiar? The first game of this genre I can remember was *Taipan* on the Apple II. Then there was *Elite*, and more recently Origin's *Privateer*. And let's not forget derivatives like *Lightspeed* and *Hyperspeed*, both of which required you to trade, negotiate, and do combat with sundry alien species.



But *Nomad* will undoubtedly be compared to *Privateer* because of the proximity of their release dates and their nearly identical premises. In both games you start with a trusty space ship and begin flying combat or trading missions from one planet to another, picking up information, tips, and clues that lead you down the storyline.

There's one big difference, though. *Privateer* is gorgeous to look at, but its animation is slow even on my 486DX/33. Though *Nomad* is fast and smooth even on a 386, the graphics are rather primitive — but that's OK with me. I like handsome graphics as much as the next guy, but if my computer is struggling just to maintain a barely acceptable frame rate, I'll take the fast animation of



flat polygons anytime. If things are moving realistically on-screen, they'll look realistic in my mind's eye.

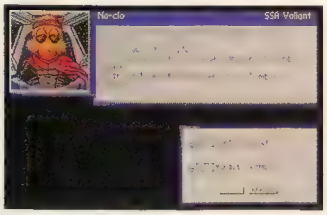
Your view is always from the cockpit of your ship, though there are external views during cinematic sequences of labor robots being sent down to a planet and shuttles carrying goods back and forth during trading sessions.

The game handles multiple objects on screen very well. Once, I was in combat with eight ships zipping around, and the action never slowed. It's actually pretty impressive when a ship approaches you, grows larger and larger without any flicker or slowdown, and then turns away. It's this kind of smoothness that makes it easy to forget they're only polygons.

Sound effects, on the other hand, are a mixed bag. Engines firing and ship explosions sound like something right out of a movie, but there's not much value in the digitized speech. The aliens' speech sounds merely like garbled human voices — in fact, I'm convinced the speech of the Arden is human speech being played backward. Since you have to read the on-screen translations anyway, the digitized speech would have been better left out; as it stands it comes across as being cheap, rather than adding value.

Another bad decision: only one save-game position. That was a mistake, and I'm sure Gametek will get an earful for it.

Though the story is far from unique, at least it's set in a big game world — Gametek claims a novel based on *Project Nomad* would be 900 pages long. There are 150 different pilots and planet representatives from 11 different races to talk to, all of whom offer various tidbits to help you along. The universe is 64 sectors in size, with each sector containing one to three star systems; each star system supports anywhere from 4 to 12 planets.



You play as an Earth intelligence officer recruited to fly a space ship in an interplanetary war against an evil robotic race called the Korok. A loose band of races, called The Alliance, is trying not to hate each other too much while they fight the common enemy. If the Arden, Phelonese, and Musin weren't fighting the Korok, they'd prob-

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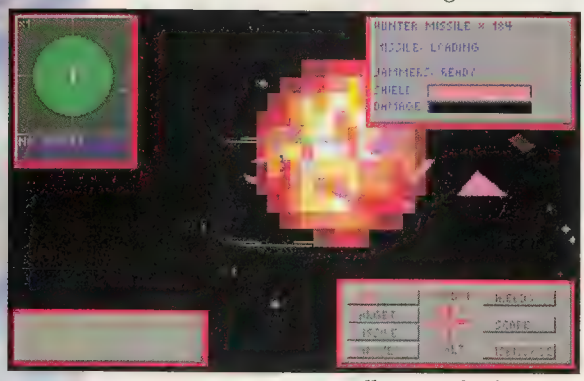
Product Information Number 113

ably be at each other's throats. You have to talk with them to find out about the others and what they value in trades.

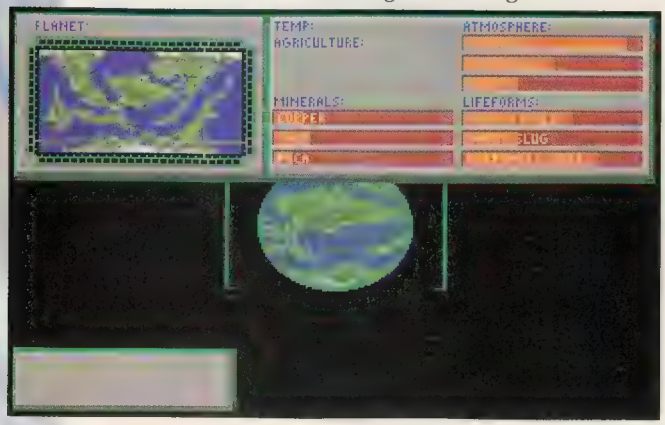
Every alliance planet has a com-net, which you use to view and choose missions. There's a broad range of missions available, including search-and-destroy sorties against enemy ships, rescuing Alliance ships under attack, delivering messages or medical supplies, and engaging in espionage for the Alliance. Once a mission is complete, check back at the com-net to receive a thank you and a reward of weapons or other riches. You're promoted after completing several missions successfully, giving you access to tougher and better-paying missions.

My favorite feature of this game is the mission log. It records all of the places you visit (but not the missions you read about on the com-net, something *Privateer* has and is needed in a game like this), and there's a feature that lets you add your own comments. Nice touch.

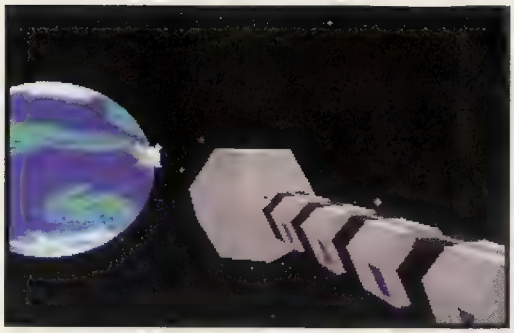


The game also has a great system for keeping track of all of the names, places, and objects you encounter. Whenever you check the com-net mission list and planet names are mentioned, they go into a list of known planets; as you talk to people, their names are automatically saved; and so forth. So the more you interact, the more you learn and pick up, and the list of names, places, and things will quickly grow huge. Unfortunately, all these things are only in your "memory," not actually recorded somewhere you can access within the game, so you'd better keep good notes.

Pay close attention to the facial expressions of the aliens with whom you're trading: A smile means they'll at least be up for a long (and hopefully informative) chat, while a frown is a good sign that the conversation will be short and the trading will be tough. And conversations can veer off in completely new directions if you pick up — or stumble across — critical information. In one instance, a character saw a medal I was given by another race. When I said I was friendly with that race, the smile became a frown, and our conversation ended very quickly.



But it does seem that, on the whole, listening is much more vital than talking; I picked up very little in the course of playing that I could use in conversations. And in the end, when I found an armada of enemy ships (including the main enemy ship) orbiting a planet, there was no way for me to gather the Alliance troops to join in a final battle.



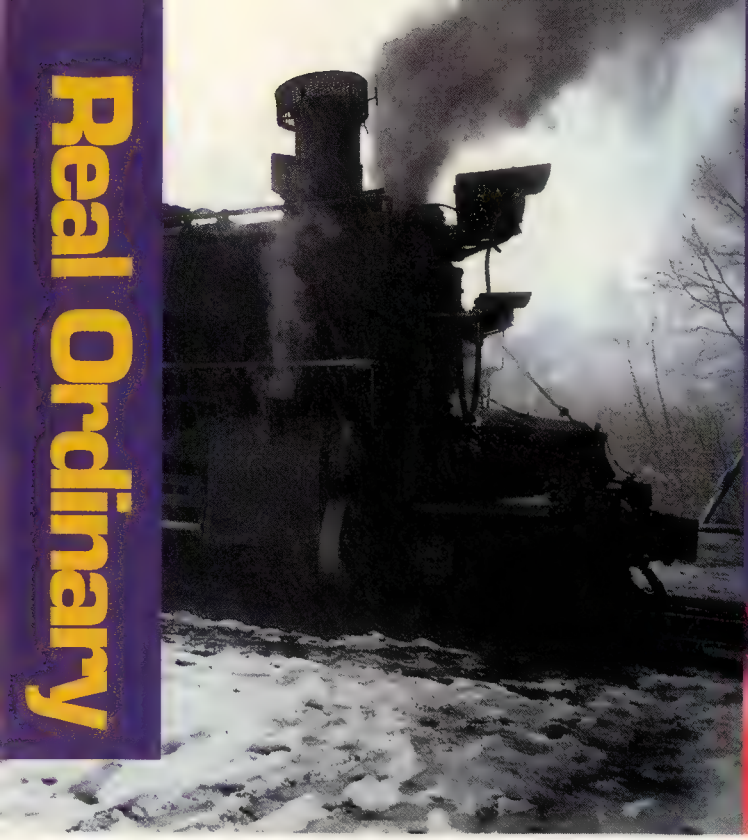
Barter is the chief element of the game. Unlike *Privateer*, where you have to pay for repairs and new ships and equipment, *Project Nomad* is entirely moneyless. You have on-board robots that repair all damage suffered in combat, and the best way to get weapons, shield boosters, missile loaders, and other equipment is through trading with other ships and, in a nice twist, with the denizens of various planets. You also receive valuable hardware upon successful completion of a mission, and you can scavenge derelict ships that have been devastated in combat.

Planet-side trading adds a unique ingredient to the game. Your ship never lands on a planet to engage in trading, but if your scanner detects important minerals like gold or titanium as you're orbiting a world, you can send down a labor robot to mine some ore. You can even send down robots to harvest crops for the races that prefer butter before guns.

One of the biggest flaws in the game is that you are saddled with a poor ship for combat and can't trade it in for a new one. The combat system is extremely crude, due mainly to the fact that the ship can't go up or down, only left and right. All you can do is accelerate, slow down, and spin left or right, effectively turning a 3-D battle into a two-dimensional affair.

And weapons selection is almost as limited as combat, with only missiles at your disposal. You can trade for more powerful missiles and missile loaders that increase reloading speed, but there's no way to add lasers, phasers, or other armaments.

In the end, *Project Nomad* seems strangely schizophrenic. It has some very original and innovative ideas framed within an overused storyline. It features some great design ideas that are hampered by some glaring design flaws. Still, *Project Nomad* was a lot of fun to play, and I'm going to keep playing it long after this review is handed in. And when you play as many games as I do, that's a hearty recommendation.



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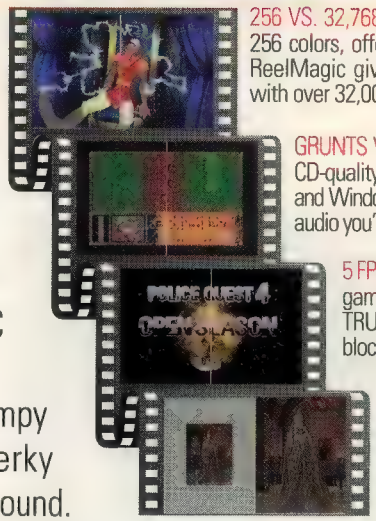

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Product Information Number 142

COMPANIONS OF XANTH

Category: Graphic Adventure

Developer: Legend Entertainment

Publisher: Legend Entertainment, 14200 Park Meadow Drive, Chantilly VA 22021

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/10 MHz or faster	386SX/16 MHz or faster
640K Ram	Sound Blaster or compatible sound card
8MB Hard-drive space	
VGA	
Mouse	

TRENT C. WARD

Having been a fan of Piers Anthony's books as a teenager, I was a bit skeptical as I loaded Legend's new *Companions Of Xanth* for the first time. I wasn't sure the true feel of Anthony's strange world could be properly re-created within the often strict confines of a PC game.

But after spending my first hour glued to the screen, my apprehensions completely vanished. With *Companions*, Legend has created a sterling reproduction of this ever-changing world of magic. What's more, it's also a fun and challenging adventure game.

Anthony's Xanth, a peninsula strangely reminiscent of Florida, is a land where all things are magical. Every person in Xanth has a unique mystical gift, or "talent," ranging from the innocuous to the deadly. Even the flora and fauna are enchanted, their powers often a bane to unwary travellers. Bordering on Xanth is the realm of Mundania, the world in which we live, a sad and dismal land with no magic. This is where you come in to the story.

You are Doug a young teen spending a rainy evening holed up in your bedroom in suburban Mundania. After making a bet with a friend about the computer game he's just finished playing, he sends you his copy of the *Companions of Xanth* quest. Upon loading the game, you're briefed on your role in Xanth by a tiny man named Grundy, who tells you to select one of four companions to accompany you on your journey to acquire a mysterious treasure. After selecting the appropriate companion (only one of the four will work), you set off, trying to beat another Mundane and her companion to this elusive prize. You'll soon discover that this is more than just a normal competition — the future of magic in Xanth is at stake!

The control interface in *Companions* is excellent, working much like LucasArts' first *Monkey Island*. At the bottom left of the screen is a list of verbs; by clicking on a verb and then on a character or an object (either in inventory or in the location display), you can perform almost any task. If you select an object and *don't* pick a verb, the game automatically selects the most obvious choice for you. The interface is obviously based on Legend's earlier engine, but allows for much more object-oriented interaction than you'd ever attempt in any of the games in the Spellcasting or Gateway series.

Another feature reminiscent of prior Legend titles is the high level of challenge. Puzzles in *Xanth* can be *very* tough, maybe too difficult for first-time players. From the beginning of the game, in fact, you realize this will be no cakewalk. Your first trial is to actually get your character to start playing the

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Product Information Number 221

computer game. This requires a long look around the house, working your way through several phone conversations, breaking up with your girlfriend, and figuring out how to get your pal to send you the game.

After reaching Xanth, the abstract problems begin, often couched in the puns for which Anthonys' books are famous. For example, your first task is to free a local village from the evil Censorships, large sailing vessels with brasiers that belch smoke which suppresses free speech — i.e., *Censer*ships. This first quest will take you through a myriad of sub-quests to find the objects you need to douse the foul censors. Later quests will take you through each of the elemental plains, into a magician's castle, and beyond the realm of dreams. Every quest requires the solving of more than one problem, allowing small victories without giving away the whole chapter.

But though *Xanth* is undeniably difficult, it

rarely frustrates. One reason is that Legend has provided several types of on-line help. Your character always carries a compendium on Xanth that was included with his game. This book contains info on all of the creatures and plants you may run across, often giving you insight on how to deal with them. If the answers can't be found in your book, you can always question your current companion on the situation. (In some cases you *must* ask for help, as only your companion will have the skills necessaria to solve given problems.)

In addition to being easy to control, *Companions of Xanth* is a beautiful game to look at. Scenes showing the plot progression use digitized actors on a rendered landscape, creating an odd mix of reality and fantasy. Even the regular scenes in the game are drawn with an eye for the fantastic, once again making you feel you've actually been pulled into another land. The game's bizarre sound effects add to the overall effect. Digitized sounds like the hacking of the cough-drop bush and the strident screams in the haunted house really bring the magical plants and animals to life.

Bells and whistles aside, however, it's the excellence of the source material — and Legend's thoughtful adaptation of it — that helps set *Xanth* apart. Anthony's world of Xanth lends itself well to the adventure format, creating sundry opportunities for unique situations and confrontations.

Instead of just taking the characters from the books and plugging them in to the same tired problems we see in every adventure game, Legend creates puzzles that incorporate the true feeling of the series. Puns, riddles, and brain-teasers await you around every corner, each one reminiscent of Anthony's original stories. Interacting with each of the four different companions, you'll realize they have different personalities, different motives, and different ways of handling difficulties. However, though the story is creative, the game does have its inconsistencies.

The difficulty rating of this game would lead you to believe it's aimed at adults. However, the storyline and dialogue often seem to wander between a children's story and a novel. The basic premise of the game seems somewhat juvenile (even the character you play is a teen), but the difficulty of the puzzles is geared toward a more mature gamer. It's a sometimes confusing mixture, and detracts from the cohesion of the game.

Focus problems aside, *Companions of Xanth* is a still an excellent game. Its unique puzzles, admirable graphics, vivid sound, and excellent setting create an adventure that fans will not soon forget. Once drawn in, you'll find it hard to stop playing, thanks to the excellent pacing and the twisted plot. Legend has made a name for itself by creating

thoughtful and addictive adventures, and *Companions of Xanth* is no exception. Though its seems oriented mainly for teens, I think most adventure gamers will find *Xanth* to be a great addition to their gaming library.

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Product Information Number 216

LOGITECH

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FRONTIER: ELITE II

Category: Space Trading/Combat Simulation

Developer: David Braben

Publisher: 2999 Northeast 191st st., Suite 500, N. Miami Beach, FL 33180

Rating:

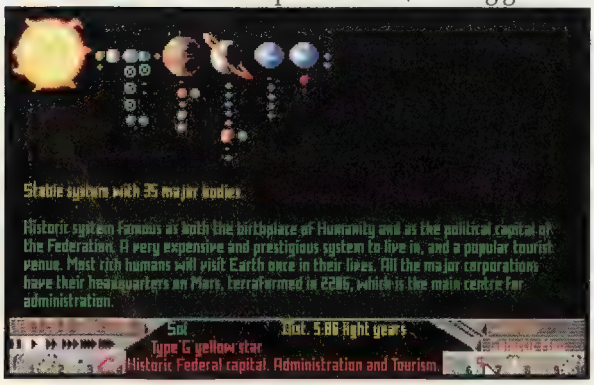
REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/20Mhz	386DX/33MHz
2MB RAM	Ram disk
MS-DOS 5.0 or higher	Roland LAPC sound card
EMS	Joystick
256-color VGA, MCGA	
Mouse	

SCOTT WOLF

When I finally surrendered my Atari 800 for a Commodore 64 in 1985, the first game I bought was Firebird's *Elite*. It was only after hundreds of hours of fevered gameplay that I realized I'd become a junkie. This unassuming little wire-frame game had become an obsession, a way of life.

1988 saw the release of Atari ST and Amiga versions, and in 1991 *Elite Plus* came to the PC. While the gaudy new filled-polygons did little to enhance the game's visual impact, it was still great fun and immensely playable.

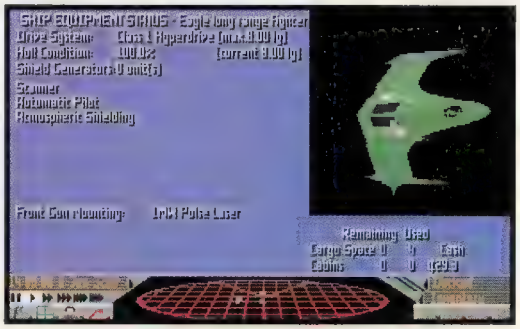
Now, after slaving away for five years on *Frontier - Elite II*, original creator David Braben (minus *Elite* partner Ian Bell) has produced a strangely unsatisfying sequel to the most popular space combat/trading game of all time. What took so long? Braben, an avid astronomy buff, has accurately mapped out our entire star system (about one hundred billion bodies in all!) in accordance with contemporary theories of planet formation.


Stable system with 35 major bodies
Historic system famous as both the birthplace of Humanity and as the political capital of the Federation. A very expensive and prestigious system to live in, and a popular tourist venue. Most rich humans will visit Earth once in their lives. All the major corporations have their headquarters on Mars, terraformed in 2286, which is the main centre for administration.
Sol
dist. 5.86 light years
Type 'G' yellow star
Historic Federal capital. Administration and Tourism.

Unfortunately, like the Total Perspective Vortex in Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series, this results in making you feel utterly insignificant. As Adams describes it, "The infinite suns, the infinite distance between them, and yourself an invisible dot on an invisible dot, infinitely small."

The fact that you begin the game so poorly equipped only adds to this feeling. As is in Origin's *Privateer*, *Frontier*'s premise is all too familiar: Your grandfather dies and leaves you with a small but serviceable ship, in this case an Eagle Long Range Fighter. Considering your ship's measly 4-ton cargo bay (after equipment fitting), a virtually useless 1-megawatt forward pulse laser, and the usual pittance of 100 credits, you're assured a long and tedious road to riches and damned little combat capability. Isn't this scenario getting a bit old? Wouldn't it be nice if, just once, Grandpa kicked and left you with enough money to kit out a proper ship right from the start?

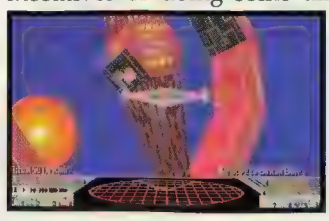
On the other hand, there's really no great pressure to get rich quick. It's perfectly acceptable to drift aimlessly from world to world, sightseeing and making just enough money to get to the next stop. You're far less likely to be attacked by pirates if you're not carrying valuable cargo. And unless you've acquired a beam laser, your pitiful attempts at self defense will only elicit laughter from your attackers. Like *Privateer* and the original *Elite*, *Frontier* is a vast,


SHIP EQUIPMENT STATUS - Eagle long range fighter
Drive System: Class 1 Hyperdrive (max 9.00 lg)
Hull Condition: 100.0% (current 9.00 lg)
Shield Generators: 0 unit(s)
Scanner
Automatic Pilot
Atmospheric Shielding
Front Gun Mounting: 1x1 Pulse Laser
Remaining Used
Cargo Space 0 0 Cash
Cabins 0 0 (c99.1)

open-ended game that allows you to play any way you like, from total immersion in the pan-galactic cold war to complete and utter detachment (who gives a rat's asteroid about politics anyway?).

All the elements that made *Elite* so popular are present in *Frontier* — you even have the option of starting out with a Cobra Mk III docked in the Lave system — but you may now purchase and outfit a number of different ships, hire crew members, and accept missions posted on spaceport bulletin boards. Most of these missions involve the simple transportation of persons or packages to distant locations, and the BBS gives you the amusing opportunity to question the solicitors about the nature of their missions and to try and weasel a little more money out of them.

Some missions are more dangerous, involving the involuntary "retirement" of corporate executives or doing some dirty work for the military, but they usually require a pilot with a higher Elite combat rating than Mostly Harmless. Your reputation pro-



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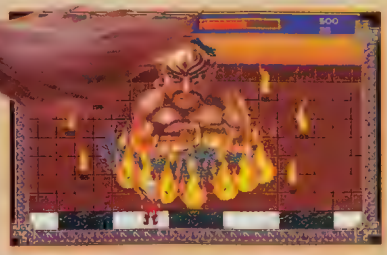

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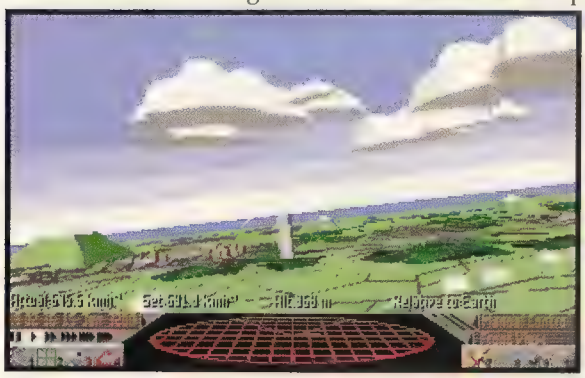
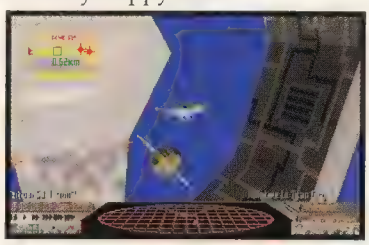
Product Information Number 113

ceeds you, wherever you go, and the simple act of lying to someone on the bulletin board will result in a lack of trust that you'll have to earn back.

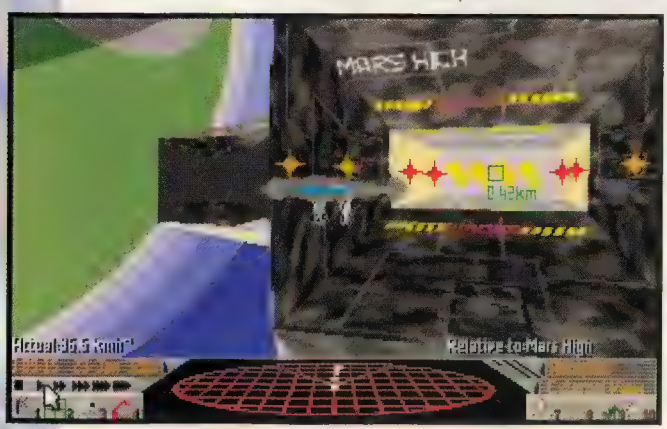
As mentioned earlier, the *Frontier* universe is staggeringly huge. If you have any doubt, just check out the 23 x 29 inch star chart included with the game — in addition to the 105-page manual, 40-page Gazetteer, and "Stories of Life on the Frontier" novella. The times and distances between worlds are real, and once you drop out of hyperspace it can take what seems like forever to reach a starport, even with the Stardreamer Time Control jacked up to ten thousand times normal. Surprisingly, though, the whole game takes up less than 1 megabyte of hard drive space and can even be played from the single low-density floppy disk!



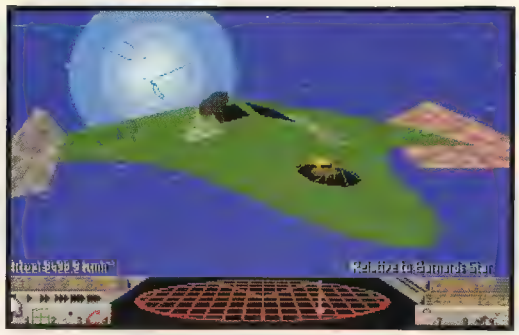
There are a variety of orbital space stations to dock with and, unlike *Elite*, *Frontier* allows you to go right down to the planets' surface and take advantage of the luxurious starport facilities. Manual docking is still a mighty test of skill, but this time Grandpa was considerate enough to ensure that you started out with an Autopilot which will handle the chore for you.



Your control panel has been updated since the original game, and now displays eight command icons (four on either side of the familiar scanner) which cycle through dozens of options depending on what mode you're in. Gone are the port- and starboard-facing gun emplacements, replaced by top and bottom turrets.



Frontier's space flight physics are totally unlike ground-based simulators. As in MicroProse's *Mantis*, the direction you're facing isn't necessarily the direction you're traveling. The effect is particularly disconcerting in combat, where your opponents

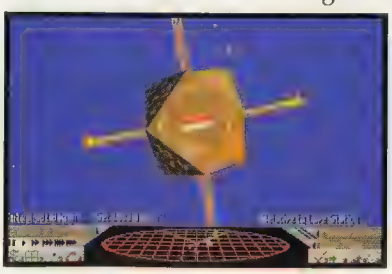


dance around you in a maddening game of hit-and-run. Once you get used to it, though, you can use this to your advantage — especially if you've mastered *Wing Commander*'s Afterburner Slide.

It's still possible to mis-jump and end up someplace other than your intended destination, and this peculiar phenomenon can be manually invoked as an emergency escape from persistent pirates. They won't even be able to track you with a Hyperspace Cloud Analyser, another one of *Frontier*'s innovative new equipment options.

Graphically, *Frontier* is a disappointment, looking more like something for the Amiga (which it was) than a powerful new PC simulation. There's a considerable amount of detail, from texture-mapped spacecraft to billboards and sprawling cityscapes, but it's all rendered in simple polygons and the whole thing runs surprisingly slow, even on a 486DX/33.

Deep space, as it appears out your window, is an oddly cheerful, star-sprinkled blue — not at all the lonely velvet black we've come to know and love. This simple color shift has a subliminal effect on the overall mood of the game: Space just doesn't seem as cold and dangerous as it ought to. The music and minimal sound effects are pretty cheesy through a Sound-Blaster Pro (Gametek highly recommends a Roland LAPC).



Frontier is going to make a lot of Amiga owners ecstatic over in the U.K. and Europe, where the machine is still going strong, but as for the PC — with the dazzling graphics and in-your-face combat of games like *Privateer* competing for the same audience — it's going to take a lot more than a faithfully modeled universe to satisfy the increasing expectations of today's PC gamers.

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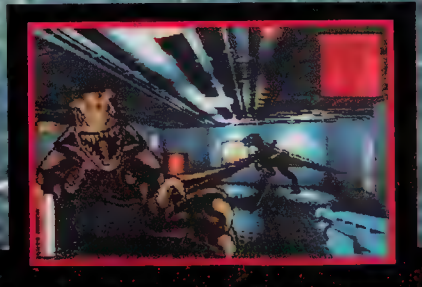

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Product Information Number 100

FANTASY EMPIRES

Category: Fantasy/strategy

Developer: Silicon Knights

Publisher: SSI, 675 Almanor Ave., Suite 201, Sunnyvale CA 94086-2901

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386/33 MHz 4 MB RAM 15 MB Hard-drive space VGA Mouse	Adlib, Sound Blaster, Roland, and compatible sound cards Joystick

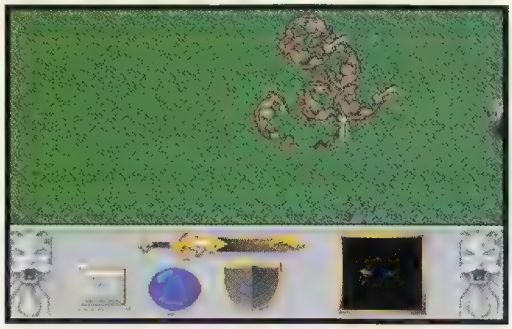
T. LIAM MCDONALD

The world of Dungeons and Dragon has been turning in new directions lately, expanding beyond the traditional fantasy role-playing forms to give this overworked genre some new twists—and were they ever needed. Mired in an endless cycle of quest games, each distinguishable only by graphic enhancements and minor interface improvements, the D&D/AD&D computer games were beginning to look a little long in the tooth.

But SSI has been doing some interesting things to change this. *Stronghold* was a unique kingdom-building/conquest game which melded *Civilization* and role-playing games to great success. *Unlimited Adventures* let you build your own dungeon-crawls, while *Dungeon Hack* offered a new dungeon with every game. Even the standard fantasy-adventure game got an infusion of new blood with the *Dark Sun* engine. Now, developer Silicon Knights have given SSI a nifty new fantasy combat game called *Fantasy Empires*, proving that there's still new ground for fantasy games to cover.

Fantasy Empires is a game of conquest, pure and simple, a war game set in the familiar D&D world. To win, you must unite the land of Mystara by conquering all 98 territories. You begin by creating a character in the traditional way: Giving him a name, race, and alignment, and "rolling" or generating his statistics in various categories. This character becomes the leader of your realm, and his strengths and weaknesses are imparted to his people. Up to five human or computer opponents can be selected, and a large library of enemies at the computer's disposal provides a good range of challenges for human players.

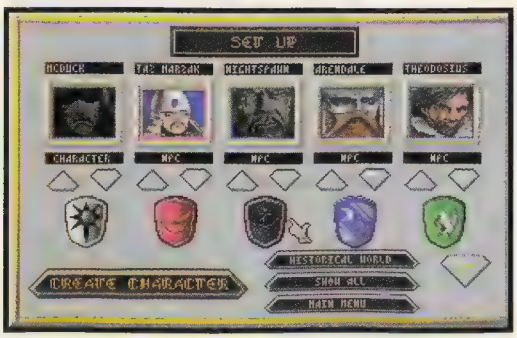
When setting up a game, you can choose an entire campaign with complete conquest as the goal, or smaller scenarios with specific short-term goals. Terrain can be set to "historical" (i.e., always



the same), or randomized for each outing, with each region having different production and income values. There's even an option for "fog of war" to hide enemy movements.

Mystara is divided into different realms, which are then subdivided into smaller regions. Beginning with a castle and some troops, you choose which neighboring lands to conquer and what structures to build. Keeps provide law-and-order (without them you lose 50 men per turn), armories produce more troops, temples train clerics, towers train magic users, and castle walls keep the enemy out. Each structure costs, of course, which is why you have to choose valuable lands that will add income to your coffers each round. Some lands generate 1000 gold pieces, other 2500 or above. The problem is, those lands that are strategically necessary (in terms of warfare) often are the least valuable.

The realms all have different characteristics, and support different types of life. Islands, blasted wastelands, mountains, volcanos, and fertile farmlands all provide their own edge when raising troops. If you want to add the devastating crossbow attacks of the Shadow Elves to your forces, for example, you must go to the Broken Lands. Furthermore, only certain places support magic users



and clerics. Since conquest involves an expenditure of both manpower and funds, choosing where you move next becomes critical.

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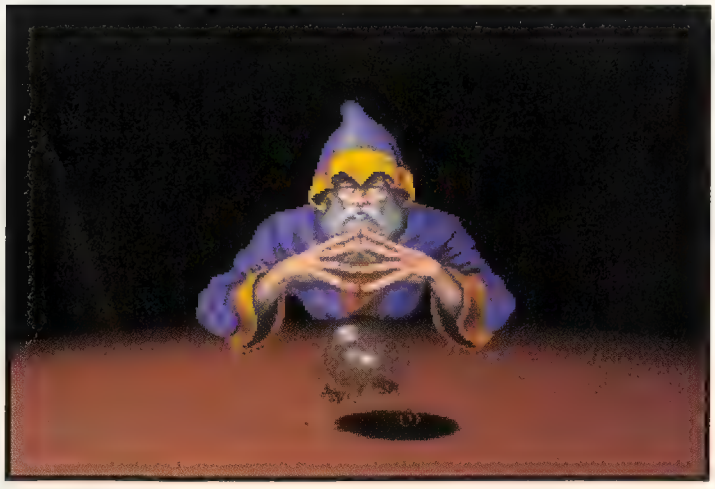
At the same time, of course, your enemies are also attempting to move in on *you*. In the beginning, you and your enemies swallow up as much neutral territory as fast as you can, with low casualties but high expenditures. Soon enough, you'll meet your enemies, and they don't fall quite so easily as the neutrals do.

The game interface is straightforward, almost self-explanatory. A strategy window, covering a small area, is set inside a framework presided over by the DungeonMaster. The window is a bit too small for planning a grand strategy, making it more of a tactical window. Some of us war-gamers do silly things like plan tactics within a strategic framework, so larger overview screens would have been nice. The grizzled old DungeonMaster watches your every move, often making suggestions for future moves. Though he doesn't do much else, he makes for nice window dressing. On either side are "power orbs" that measure magic usage.

Simple toggles allow you to designate which regions should raise troops, what kind to raise, how many, and how they should be deployed. Building and maintaining a large army is expensive, but in *Fantasy Empires*, overwhelming numbers is the only way to assure victory. Depending upon what your region can support, you can build melee-combat troops like fighters or dwarfs, you can create archers, or you can train magic users or clerics. Ballistas (large siege weapons that resemble crossbows) and catapults can also be constructed.

"Heros" — characters with superior characteristics, costing more to build — can be sent on hero quests for magic items or ancient artifacts.



These quests come in five levels of difficulty, from Veteran's Quest to Forbidding Quests. The more difficult the quest, the better the loot — but greater rewards entail greater risks. Magic items, such as a Sword of Extra Damage or Boots of Speed, give the hero an edge in battle. If the heros find artifacts on the quest, they are deposited in the imperial vault, where they can give an entire kingdom an edge. Lightening rods, Staffs of Holiness, Crystal Balls, and other items allow you to launch attacks from a safe distance, increase your power, or see deep into enemy territory.

When it's time to invade, simply choose the region and designate how many troops are to move on the enemy. The combat impulse takes place at turn's end, and results can either be randomized or played out in an arcade sequence. You begin by setting out your troops in battle formation, and casting any spells you might have available. Seen from a bird's-eye view, these battles take place in real time, with you controlling whichever fighting unit you like and the computer controlling the rest.

Combat is handled through keyboard commands which, though awkward, can be reprogrammed. You're treated to some fairly attractive graphics as you advance, retreat, or strike the enemy, but there aren't any really satisfying grunts and thwacks to accompany the carnage. Of course, you can do away with these arcade sequences altogether, or choose which battles to fight each time. The results, however, can be markedly different when you lead your troops yourself rather than letting the combat results be based upon an arbitrary, randomly-generated number. Outnumbered troops often triumph when under the gamer's direct leadership, whereas they'll always lose when the results are handled by the computer.

The opponents in *Fantasy Empires* are a varied lot, from weak and timid to well-nigh godlike in their power — luckily, you start with the weak and timid and work your way up. As little as one or as many as five opponents can be chosen for a given campaign. Often they'll send message offering treaties or requesting (sometimes demanding) financial aid. Treaties, requiring a substantial tribute so as not to offend, can keep an opponent off your back while you turn on another. If you helped one player early in the game, he may help you when you need it.

Fantasy Empires is a fresh change of pace for D&D gamers, and sure to be welcomed as a relief from endless quests. While it may be somewhat lightweight for seasoned war-gamers, it's still offers up some entertaining battles. It's a safe bet D&D fans will eat this one up, but there's also enough strategy here to please players who normally shy away from fantasy games.

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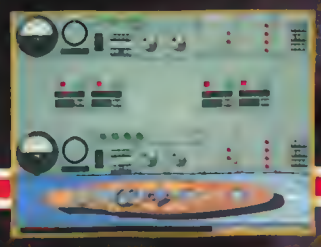

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TFX: TACTICAL FIGHTER EXPERIMENT

Category: Air-Combat Simulation

Developer: Digital Image Design

Publisher: Ocean of America, 1855 O'Toole Ave., Suite D-102 San Jose CA 95131

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386DX/33MHz	486DX/33 MHz
2 MB RAM	4 MB RAM
256-color VGA	Disk-caching utility
MS-DOS 5.0 or higher	Supported sound card
12-16 MB Hard-drive space	Joystick

Before reading the following review of TFX, Ocean's sophisticated new combat flight simulation, please help us determine your attitude towards computer flight sims by selecting one of the following:

SCOTT WOLF

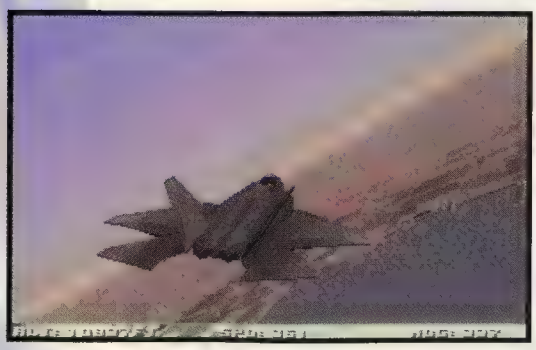
A) There is no flight sim realistic enough to satisfy me.

B) I just wanna strap in and destroy Destroy DESTROY!!!

C) I'd rather be playing Super Mario Bros.

If you answered C, get outta here, your Nintendo's calling. If you answered A or B, then congratulations — you qualify for duty in *Tactical Fighter Experiment*.

In 1989 Ocean released a nifty little combat flight sim called *F-29 Retaliator*. Produced by Digital Image Design Ltd. in Cheshire, England, *F-29* featured two experimental aircrafts, Lockheed's YF-22A, and Grumman's YF-29. Although it boasted some fast 3-D animation (something DID is quite expert at), it was very much action-oriented and featured extremely simple flight models which had the annoying habit of crashing into objects that weren't there.



In many ways, *TFX: Tactical Fighter Experiment* is a pumped-up and updated version of *Retaliator*. This time around the emphasis is on realism, and features what DID is calling "the most authentic flight model ever available in a computer combat simulation." Even Ocean's advertising for TFX proudly proclaims "No More Games" in order to stress the simulation's high level of realism, but don't let that scare you away if you're a more casual flight enthusiast — DID (also responsible for *Robocop 3D* and *Epic*) never lost sight of the fact that flight sims are also supposed to be *fun*.

As a member of *TFX*'s United Nations Air Force, formed to uphold the UN's peacekeeping charter, you have at your disposal three genuine, classified "peacekeepers" -- the Eurofighter 2000, Lockheed F-22 Superstar, and Lockheed F-117A Stealth Fighter. Four different flight models are available for each of these exotic birds, ranging from Arcade (where ordnance and the laws of physics have no effect on performance) to Military Spec, the aforementioned "creme de la creme" of flight models. DID recommends a 486DX/50 for the Military Spec models, but they behave well on a 33 and will set your pants on fire with a 66!

The same generic cockpit is used for all three aircraft. In addition to the highly detailed Head-Up Display there are three Multi-Function Displays and a new helmet-mounted HUD which lets you take full advantage of *TFX*'s Virtual Cockpit, a feature quite similar to *Strike Commander*'s panning control.

Unlike a standard forward view, the Virtual Cockpit pulls back from the control panel a bit and mimics the pilot's independent point of view, rather than the plane's. While not exactly a "padlock view," the VC gives the impression that your head is "on a swivel," and panning from the VC is smoother than from the forward view (though you still have to switch back to read your instruments). The Virtual Cockpit mode is especially dramatic during air-to-air refuelling from the KC-10 tanker (the EF 2000 refuels "probe and drogue" Navy-style while the F-117 and F-22 use the USAF's "flying boom" method).

Once you've enrolled in the UNAF you are offered six game-play options. Arcade mode is similar to Instant Action in most flight sims -- there's no takeoff or landing, just five levels of increasingly intense aerial action, each in an environment with it's own unique terrain, weather, and level of enemy competence. The Simulator

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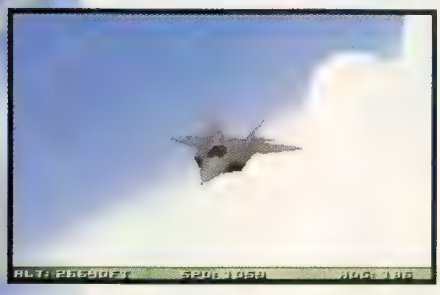
allows you to safely fly and fight in a personally selected environment. Here your choice of location, weather conditions, and time of day determines which aircraft you fly and whether you begin on a carrier deck, land-based runway, or in the air.

Training consists of 10 hops out of the USAF Fighter Weapons School designed to familiarize you with the seven basic mission profiles -- Interception, Air Superiority, Anti-Armor, Close Air Support, Interdiction, Defense Suppression, and Maritime. You must complete all training missions in order to progress to Flashpoints and Tour of Duty campaigns.

Tour of Duty lets you join one of 3 squadrons — the F-22 Superstars, the F-117 Darkstars or the EF-2000 Blue Angels — and fly with them in actions around the world. The theatre of operations is revealed only after you've signed on, along with a full briefing of the situation at hand and map of the mission area.

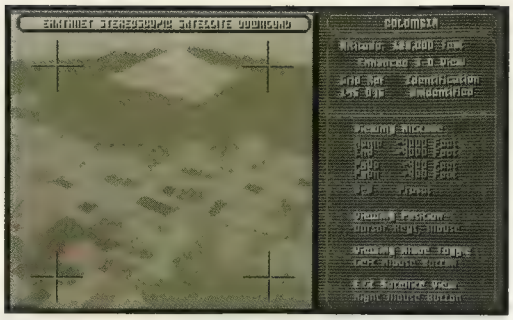


Flashpoints are basically the Tour of Duty missions served up à la carte. You pick a scenario and then monitor news reports, press conferences, and UN Assembly-crisis meetings as the story's backdrop unfolds before your eyes. Aircraft and loadout are chosen for you — all you have to do is complete the missions.

And as if that weren't enough, the UN Commander lets you custom-build your own missions anywhere in the *TFX* world. Using detailed satellite imagery to scan the area and select targets, you also determine time of day, weather, quality and quantity of enemy threats, and which aircraft is best suited for the job.

Gone are *F-29*'s thinly veiled references to such countries as "Syrias" and "Egypta;" This time you're flying in five real-life trouble spots whose storylines are right out of tomorrow's news — the Drug War in Columbia, Operation Restore Hope II in Somalia, Iraqi-inspired antics in Libya, continued chaos in Yugoslavia, and some nuclear nuttiness in the South Atlantic. Almost every man-made object on the map is worth points, but as a UN peace envoy your mission is not to blow up everything in sight. Doing so will incur the wrath of the media (the whole world is watching via the Worldwide News Network), not to mention UN Command.

TFX's environment is huge — DID has mapped out approximately 1/20th of the world's surface (about 5 million square miles) and it can actually take over an hour to cross the mission map when not using the Time Warp mode. The polygon-based world graphics are relatively simple, but are rendered in such a masterful way as to create the illusion of great depth — at high altitude you've got visibility of about 100 miles! The planes are Gouraud-shaded, and the whole package looks like a splendid mixture of Spectrum Holobyte's *Falcon 3.0* and MicroProse's *Jump Jet*.



Realistic weather conditions also create some spectacular effects. How many other flight sims let you launch day or night from an aircraft carrier in a driving rainstorm, while lightning flashes all around you? And yet, once you climb above the thunderhead it's all blue sky (during the day of course) and thick, rolling cumulus clouds. In colder climes the rain turns to snow, and on long lonely stealth missions the cold, impassive moon is your only companion as you soar undetected (hopefully) over the twinkling lights of sleeping foreign cities.

TFX contains over 600K of digitized audio, including radio transmissions from friendly aircraft ("Break Right!", "Toasted Bogey!", "They're

all over me — Do something!"). The speech is surprisingly clear, and when G-forces are enabled you can actually hear yourself performing "the grunt" to keep from losing consciousness. The in-game music is fine for Arcade mode or to pass the time on long flights, but is otherwise distracting and may be switched off. A CD-ROM version, which should be available shortly, offers additional sound and graphics and allows Sound Blaster owners to select CD quality music in the game (there's also an astounding 20 MB preview of *Inferno*, the upcoming sequel to *Epic*).

TFX fully supports the CH Flightstick Pro and the complete ThrustMaster line, but in the pre-release review copy the rudder pedals, useful only in Realistic and Military Spec flight models, were reversed (the right pedal yaws you left and vice versa). Ocean and DID both swore this would be corrected by the time the game hits shelves, but we'll wait and see.

Otherwise, *TFX* is quite an achievement. It successfully combines an ultra-realistic flight environment with an extremely playable game structure. There's something here for every flight-sim fan, whether you can recite thrust-to-weight ratios in your sleep or wouldn't know an accurate flight model if it crawled up your leg and bit you.

MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 5.0

Category: Flight simulation

Developer: Bruce Artwick Organization, Inc.

Publisher: Microsoft Home, One Microsoft Way, Redmond WA 98052-6399

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/20 MHz	486DX2/50MHz or faster
2 MB RAM	SVGA
DOS 3.2 or higher	4 MB RAM
17 MB Hard-drive space	Joystick, yoke, or Mouse
EGA	Sound Blaster or compatible sound card

T. LIAM MCDONALD

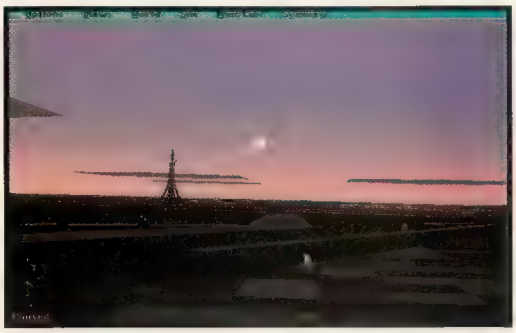
The desire to fly is as old as mankind. With a pilot's license costing at least $3000, many of us have to settle for simulated flight, and the unchallenged leader of flight simulators has long been Bruce Artwick's *Microsoft Flight Simulator*, now in a newly enhanced 5th incarnation. The emphasis in this version is on stunning graphics, and Microsoft delivers these in spades.

Like most red-blooded American men, I usually prefer my computer flight sims with bullets and bombs. Upon seeing a beautifully rendered building or bridge, my first impulse is to let fly with an air-to-ground missile or laser-guided bomb. Why worry about air traffic over LaGuardia when you have a .50-caliber chaingun?

Alas, *Microsoft Flight Simulator* has not cured me of these impulses, and is not likely to as long as *Aces Over Europe* is still on my hard drive. But it *has* given me a new appreciation of the capabilities of computer flight simulators, and provided a valuable tool in my preparations for learning how to fly.

It's tempting to equate flying small aircraft with driving an automobile, the only difference being movement along the vertical, as well as the horizontal, plane. Until Chrysler starts making LeBarons with OBIs and NAV radios, this will remain a spurious comparison at best. Upon entering airspace, the private pilot is confronted with a sometimes bewildering variety airspace ratings. Flight dynamics are constantly affected by air currents, weather, pressure fronts, and temperature. The "highways" along which airplanes travel are invisible, and a combination of dead-reckoning and perceptive instrument use is necessary to arrive at a given destination.

Gaining enough mastery of all these elements to remain safely airborne, while still enjoying the thrill and beauty of flying, is exactly what *MFS5* is all about. With its focus on accurately



modeled aerodynamics, attention to flight protocol, and stunning graphics rather than combat, it teaches as it entertains. Four aircraft are included in *MFS5*: a Cessna-182 single prop, common in training; a Learjet, for a more fast-paced and complex flight experience; a sailplane, to challenge the air currents without an engine; and a Sopwith Camel bi-wing for barnstorming and crop-dusting. Having handled a Cessna, I can safely say that the flight modeling here is top-of-the-line. Lift, thrust, drag, bank, and yaw are all rendered authentically, allowing the user to really "feel" the weight of the machine as it goes through its paces. Even more impressive is the way instrumentation has been handled, with *MFS5* providing an ideal introduction to the intimidating array of an aircraft's instruments, gauges, and indicators.

Numerous major and minor airports spanning America and Europe are included, with handsome scenery along the way made even more handsome by the numerous scenery packs being released. Some flight situations and small navigation games are thrown in to provide a little diversion from plotting nav points. Other additions that show Microsoft's considerable attention to detail include in-flight photography and videotaping; flight, maneuvering, and crash analysis; a dual-player mode; flight lessons; a logbook; and numerous aircraft configurations.

MFS5 is not, nor does it claim to be, a flight-training program. Actual flight training would require considerably more complex elements, and make the program a lot more difficult to use. *MFS5* does serve as an eye-opening introduction to cross-country pleasure flying, though, and as an entertaining diversion from driving 55 mph along life's highway.

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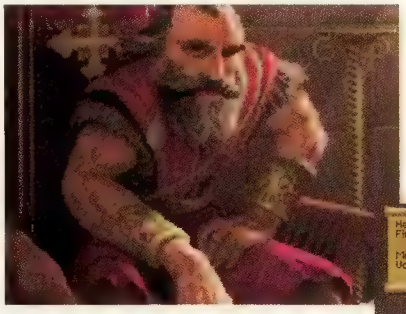

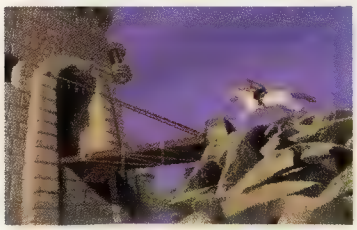

The Dark Army is on the move, led by the shape-shifting sorceress Scotia—and each time you meet her she'll be more powerful and terrifying than the last. But your powers can grow, too. Experienced-based character development makes great warriors of those who take arms (in real-time combat) against a sea of indescribable monsters and makes mighty wizards of those who cast Larger-Than-Life spells. Explore ancient castles, living forests, hidden lairs, bustling towns, haunted caverns, through 30 enchanted levels made vividly real by more than 20 MB of compressed art and special effects.

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THE TERMINATOR: RAMPAGE

Category: Action/Arcade

Developer: Bethesda Softworks

Publisher: Bethesda Softworks, 1370 Piccard Drive, Rockville MD 20850

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386/25 MHz 4 MB of RAM (with 2 MB EMS) Memory Manager 18 MB Hard-drive space VGA	486/33 MHz Mouse or Joystick Sound Blaster or compatible sound card

TRENT C. WARD

The future is doomed — almost. After altering the past, SKYNET has destroyed all human life except for a handful of desperate soldiers led by the now legendary John Conner. Trapped in time, these warriors have one last hope...a forgotten suit of powered armor. In Bethesda's new *The Terminator: Rampage*, grab what weapons you can and try to restore the past you remember, or else you'll have no future to return to.

Terminator: Rampage is Bethesda's third offering in the Terminator universe, this time with a storyline not based on anything in the two movies. The game is chock-full of creatures from the Earth's twisted future — some of them familiar, some of them created specifically for the game. However, while the story and the characters may be unique, the game itself is not. With *Rampage*, Bethesda has become another subscriber to the now famous *Wolfenstein 3-D* type action game, making great new additions in some areas, but missing the mark set by the competition in others.

One of the main disappointments is the graphics — they're often murky and unclear, and the animation is choppy even on higher end systems (I played on a 486/66 MHz). Lowering the detail level of the graphics didn't seem to help the frame rate; in fact, it didn't seem to change anything at all. The objects you see in the game always appear as if you're facing them head-on no matter what angle you approach them from, causing a disorienting effect when trying to determine which doors you've already been through. The slow frame rate aggravates this problem — the jerky movement makes it difficult to tell how far your character has turned, and also keeps you from drawing a bead on the enemy.

On the plus side, *Terminator: Rampage* does offer a lot of atmosphere. There's a wide variety of different weapons to find in the game, each producing a variety of shot patterns and explosions. The enemies are fun to watch, with Infiltrator units losing their skin and revealing more of their metallic skeleton as they take damage. Higher level opponents have more powerful artificial intelligence, becoming more and more devious as you work your way through the complex.

Since there's precious little ammo to be found, the game never degenerates into a slaughter — players who blast away with wild abandon will find themselves defenseless in the worst locations possible. But *Terminator* doesn't reward the overly cautious, either: If you're not thorough you'll find downed robots rising up and coming back for more, often attacking from behind. All of this, combined with the dimly lit corridors and grim reminders of human inhabitance, give the game a dark and eerie ambience. An equally gloomy soundtrack and subtle sound effects enhance this feeling of despair.

Looking at a game like *Rampage*, you can't help but think "If only": If the storyline and extras — great variety of weapons, interesting enemies, and appropriate ambience — had been combined with a crisp display and smoother animation, *Rampage* would have been close to perfect. As it is, *Terminator: Rampage* is still a fair title, but one that constantly reminds you that you're playing a computer game, never letting you become absorbed in this imaginary world.

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a Dreamers Guild creation

Product Information Number 241

AIR FORCE COMMANDER: WW2

Category: Strategy War Game

Developer: Impressions

Publisher: Impressions, 7 Melrose Drive
Farmington, CT 06032

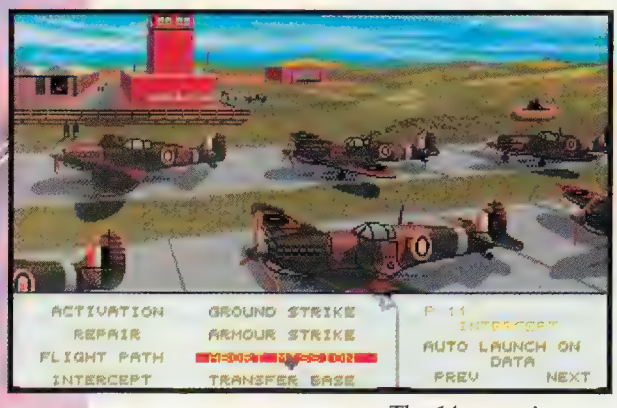
Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/12 MHz or better 640K RAM 1 MB hard-drive space DOS 3.0 VGA Mouse	AdLib, Sound Blaster, or compatible sound card

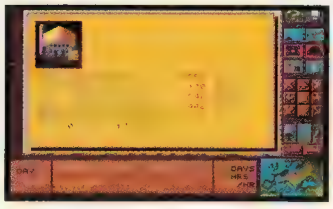
JEFF SEIKEN

The first *Air Force Commander* had its quirky charms, not the least of which was the freshness of its premise. While there are strategy games aplenty dealing with conflict on land and at sea, how many can you name that are concerned solely with the aerial side of warfare?

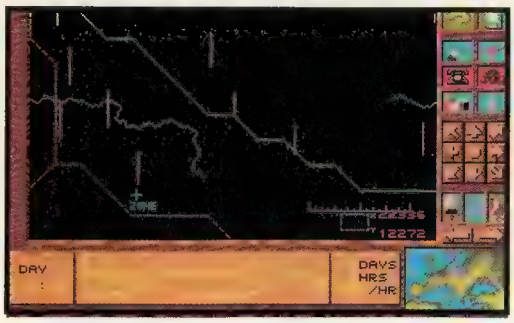
Now Impressions has released a sequel, *Air Force Commander: WW2*, which shifts the focus from the modern Middle East to the great aerial campaigns that raged across Europe during the Second World War. Except for this change in time and setting, however, the game plays exactly the same as the first, and therein lies the problem. The novelty of the whole idea has worn thin, making the creakiness of the basic design a good deal harder to overlook.



The 14 scenarios cover everything from the Battle of Britain and the Allied bomber offensives of 1944-45 to various what-if situations. *AFC:WW2* is strictly a solitaire affair, but you can take either side in a scenario — hence Impressions' rather disingenuous claim that the game comes with 28 scenarios. Play is in real time, and continues until one side has attained complete air superiority or wreaked so much havoc on the other's infrastructure that its leaders capitulate.



Most scenarios require you to act in both an offensive and defensive capacity, dispatching bombers to strike the enemy's installations while sending up fighter patrols to protect friendly air space. There's also an economic component thrown in to add a bit more intricacy to planning. In general, nations lack the ability to keep their entire air force operational and so you must juggle priorities, deciding which squadrons to activate and also when to divert resources to meet civilian needs.



Air Force Commander: WW2 makes little pretence of being a serious historical simulation, aiming instead to be a fast-paced, challenging game of strategy. For a program with these aspirations, though, the presentation leaves a lot to be desired. Because of the spartan graphics and lack of data displays, it's almost impossible to keep tabs on what's happening, or to respond intelligently once the game gets underway. The clumsy interface is badly suited to the demands of real-time game play — due largely to the fact that orders can be issued to only one squadron at a time — and only compounds the problem. Assigning missions becomes a real chore, especially in the larger scenarios where the player may have a hundred or more squadrons under his command. Of course, the same complaints could have been directed at the original *Air Force Commander* in 1992, but such shortcomings are harder to excuse now that Impressions has had more than a year to tweak the design. In all fairness to Impressions, however, I should mention that the company did see fit to make one change to *Air Force Commander: WW2*: They slashed the price to $19.99. Given the rising costs of brand new games, this seems like a reasonable amount to pay for leftover goods.

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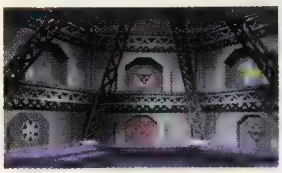

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Product Information Number 106

QUEST FOR GLORY: SHADOWS OF DARKNESS

Category: Graphic Adventure

Developer: Sierra

Publisher: Sierra, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614

Rating:

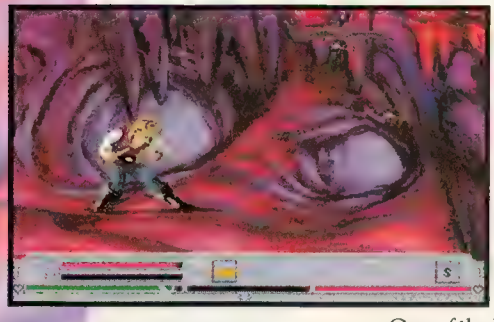
REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/16 MHz	386DX/25 Mhz (486 for Windows support)
4 MB RAM	4 MB RAM
16 MB Hard-drive space	Supported sound cards
DOS 5.0 or higher	
VGA	
Mouse	

Horrors! *Quest for Glory: Shadows of Darkness* is full of horrors! Set in a world of garlic, gravediggers, and gypsies, the game is thick with atmosphere and promise — but the end result may make you scream.

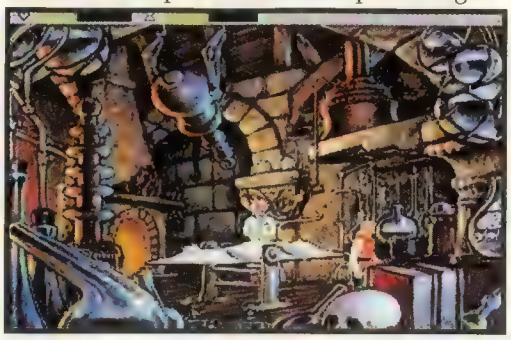
LESLIE MIZELL

Lori and Corey Cole set their fourth *Quest for Glory* game in Mordavia, a Slavic forest land that's being threatened, not only by the mysterious swamp that has cut it off from the rest of the world, but also from members of a mysterious cult who call themselves the Dark Ones. And then there are those persistent rumors of werewolves and vampires....

As the champion of the first three games in the Quest for Glory series — *So You Want to Be a Hero, Trial by Fire,* and *Wages of War* — you've been summoned to Mordavia by some unknown mystic source. You don't know your mission, but there are so many people in trouble that you're able to jump right in and start acting heroic. There's Nicholai, whose wife is missing; innkeepers Yuri and Bella, whose daughter has disappeared; Rusalka, the local siren, luring men to their doom; Davy, the gypsy who's arrested as a werewolf; and the strange Borgovs from the castle up the hill, who are never seen by daylight. And what of Dr. Cranium, the local mad scientist?

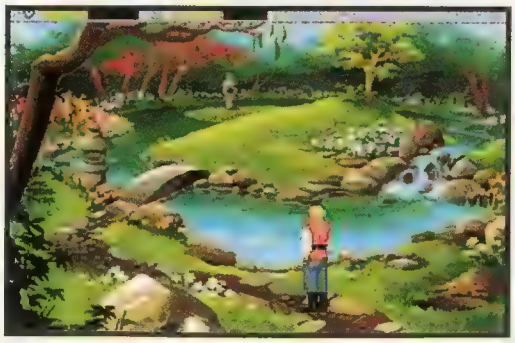


One of the best things about the *Quest for Glory* series is its solid replay value. You can play the game as a fighter, magician, or thief, and many of the puzzles are unique to the character you portray. Thieves, for example, get to break into people's houses, magicians can befriend fairie folk, and fighters get to go on hunts. It's also possible to import heroes from earlier adventures into *Shadows of Darkness*. You probably come out ahead in the stats department if you do: An experienced thief, for example, should end up with significantly higher Agility, Communication, Stealth, and Throwing Ability than a newly created character.



Despite a setting that should provide fertile ground for adventuring, *Shadows of Darkness* has a vaguely unfinished feel — and not just because I'm waiting for a patch-disk to fix a bug that has my hero trapped in one of the swamp rooms. For the first half of the game, you don't seem to do much more than walk through the forest and work out in the Adventurer's Guild (that medieval Stairmaster is pretty neat, but it gets old fast). Things pick up once you start collecting the Dark One Rituals, but by then nearly two weeks of game-time have passed!

By and large, *Shadows of Darkness* doesn't match the complexity of *QGIII: Wages of War*, the best of the series so far. The plot isn't as well-developed, the world isn't as large, the music isn't as original, and the graphics haven't improved much. That said, however, *Quest for Glory* is still a top-notch adventure cycle, so even a game that's not up to previous installments is still an improvement over most of the competition. There are scads of puzzles to solve in *Shadows of Darkness*, new and familiar characters to fight or serve, and an impressive new combat system that lets you decide whether to use your brains or fists.



So you'll have fun playing *Shadows of Darkness*, you'll look forward to the next episode... but you'll nonetheless be a little disappointed.

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QUANTUM GATE

Category: Interactive Movie

Developer: Hyperbole Studios

Publisher: Media Vision , 47300 Bayside Parkway, Fremont CA 94538

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
486SX/20 or better w/ CD-ROM drive 8 MB RAM 10 MB Hard-drive space DOS 5.0 or higher SVGA (640 x 480 x 256) Windows-compatible 8-bit sound card	16 MB hard-drive space 65,536-color SVGA 16-bit sound card. Mouse

Computer entertainment is — by fits and starts — entering a new CD-ROM age. New technologies and approaches marked the evolution from *Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective* to *The 7th Guest* to *Return to Zork*, but at the core, these were all recognizable as *games*. They had better graphics and denser sound, as well as video-taped actors, but the structure and intent was basically the same as traditional games.

T. LIAM MCDONALD

But now we're being told we're playing "Interactive Movies," and it raises some important questions for gamers. Is something an interactive movie when it is in fact just a very linear adventure game that's been liberally seasoned with video footage? If so, then what's the difference?

Quantum Gate: No One Dreams Here begs these questions more than any other multimedia product yet produced. Though not altogether successful, it is an interesting, at times inspired, product. Written and directed by Greg Roach, this first installment in a projected series uses sharp animation, professional actors, and decent video quality to immerse the user in its story. We find Earth, in the year 2057, on the brink of environmental collapse, with only five years before the situation becomes irreversible. The key lies on the harsh planet AJ3905, which has a large quantity of the mineral iridium oxide, necessary for the regeneration of the ozone layer. This planet lies in a parallel reality accessible only through the Quantum Gate.

You play as indentured soldier Andrew Griffin, an ex-med school student running from his past. Griffin is part of a large force assigned to protect a mining outpost on AJ3905 from the insectoid creatures that inhabit the planet. As Griffin, you can navigate through the three floors of the base, enter some of its 15 rooms, talk to people, and log onto the Militerm computer to access news, debriefing info, music, and letters from home.

The graphics are handsome, but whenever the scene moves, the image shrinks to the size of a QuickTime window. After seeing the massive amounts of data moved in the full-screen graphics of *The 7th Guest*, this hardly seems cutting edge. The video images themselves are sharp and well-composed, and the acting is solid. Odd montages of images and sound effects create an almost hallucinatory atmosphere at times. Roach has tried to do something different with the look of *Quantum Gate*, and it works, showing just how developers can break free from standard screen composition.

As your travel around, meet people, and go through Griffin's flashbacks, the story slowly fills in, though it *never* becomes completely clear. You meet interesting people and see interesting things, but you don't really interact with them in any way that matters — despite the "interactive movie" label, this is a painfully passive experience. There are dialogue trees at certain points, and while different answers may elicit different responses from the characters, they will *not* change the course of the story. There's another stab at interactivity in the form of an arcade-like sequence in which you shoot aliens, but it's slow and not too interesting.

Quantum Gate barely qualifies as a game; what it is isn't quite clear. If David Lynch had directed a semi-interactive TV show based on *Aliens*, it might be something like this. The story seems almost deliberately cryptic, and I have yet to talk to any players who have won the concluding arcade sequence. It is also very short, with a playtime of about two hours. In the end, despite many intriguing elements, it simply does not satisfy, either as a movie *or* a game.

PINBALL FANTASIES

Category: Pinball Simulation

Publisher: Frontline Design

Developer: 21st Century Entertainment, P.O. Box 415, Webster, NY 14580

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/16 MHz or faster	386/20 MHz
640K RAM	SVGA
3.6 MB Hard-drive space	Supported sound cards
DOS 3.3 or higher	
VGA	

STEPHEN POOLE

If you like playing pinball on your PC, I've got some advice for ya: Buy *Pinball Fantasies* from 21st Century Entertainment. And if you *don't* like playing pinball on your PC, give *Pinball Fantasies* a try — it just might change your mind.

I've spent a lot of time with all the recently released PC pinball games — *Eight Ball Deluxe*, *Silverball*, and *Pinball Dreams* (also from 21st Century) — and I can say with confidence that you can't buy a better pinball package than *Pinball Fantasies*.

For starters, *Pinball Fantasies* has a ton of replay value, thanks to four top-notch tables designed with an eye for the ramps, bonus multipliers, flipper-selectable targets, and high-speed action that pinball fans crave. Of the four, I found myself instantly addicted to "Party Land," a multi-ramped affair with a carnival theme, and "Stones and Bones," a spooky table with ghosts, goblins, tombstones, bats — and a casketful of letter targets for lighting bonuses.

I didn't go as nutso over "Billion Dollar Game Show" or "Speed Devils," but that doesn't mean they aren't excellently designed tables. One *PC Entertainment* team member fell head over heels for "Billion Dollar Game Show" (and racked up the highest *Pinball Fantasies* score of anyone in the office), while another really dug the revving engines and smoking rubber of "Speed Devils." Any way you look at it, the variety of tables here makes *Pinball Fantasies* a real value.

Frontline Design, the developers of the PC version of *Pinball Fantasies*, have made a lot of improvements over the engine in *Pinball Dreams*, the most obvious being the graphics. Though *Pinball Fantasies* looks and plays just fine in standard VGA (320 x 200 x 256), in SVGA the tables are simply stunning. And the higher resolution means that more of the table will fit on the scrolling screen, making shot placement at upper targets much easier.

Pinball Dreams was plagued with sound problems, but *Fantasies* has some of the richest — and coolest — music I've heard in a PC game. The snaky, hypnotic bass of "Stones and Bones," the infectious circus music of "Party Land," and the outstanding drumming of the music accompanying the opening screen — all serve to prove that Frontline and 21st Century were committed to aural as well as visual excellence.

Several options missing from *Dreams* have been added to *Fantasies*. You can now play with three or five balls per game; select high or low table angle; and choose soft, medium, or hard scrolling (I think hard scrolling means *faster* scrolling, but I could discern no major difference in the settings; maybe it would be more noticeable on a slower PC). And now the "M" key *does* toggle the music during a game!

But the crucial test of a PC pinball game is how it plays, and again *Fantasies* earns very high marks. The action is *very* fast, the ball moves realistically, and it seems that with this game it's much easier to get into a "groove" — repeatedly sending a ball around a loop or up a ramp — than in any other PC pinball title I've tried. It just feels *real*.

Pinball Fantasies has it all — killer sound effects and music, eye-catching table graphics, and jamming game play. The only thing missing is the sound of the ball rolling on the table — and if Frontline and 21st Century are true to form, we can expect *that* in their next title. Great going, guys!

GABRIEL KNIGHT: THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

Category: Graphic Adventure

Developer: Sierra On-Line

Publisher: Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386DX/25 4MB RAM 18MB Hard-drive space MS-DOS 5.0 or higher VGA Mouse	486SX/25 or faster Sound Blaster or compatible sound card

Almost all of Sierra's graphic adventures have turned into series: *Police Quest*, for example, and of course *Leisure Suit Larry*. With *Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers*, we're witnessing the very promising birth of a new adventure cycle.

MATTHEW A. FIRME

The eponymous Knight is an aspiring writer and book dealer, based in the colorful environs of New Orleans' French Quarter. He's a disheveled, hip, likeable character, and in the beginning of the game he seems to have a lot less idea where his life is headed than we do. His book store — left to him by his father — isn't making much money, and a severe case of writer's block has really slowed the actual writing component of his career. But he eagerly dogs his police-detective buddy Mosely, with whose help he hopes to crank out a real-life murder book. He prefers field work to desk work — and that preference guides his life down a remarkable path.

The fact that Knight is a strong character is important, because ultimately all graphic adventures are pretty much alike. You talk to people, search rooms, pick up objects, and move on to the next scene. There's nothing wrong with that: in fact, it's those familiar ground rules that draw me back to the genre again and again. But a successful graphic adventure requires a character you'll enjoy playing as, and a story worth playing through to the end. *Gabriel Knight*'s got 'em both.

As Knight investigates a bizarre series of murders, he's drawn into the New Orleans Voodoo subculture. It's a fascinating world, and the game's designers do a nice job of balancing the true origins of this strange religion with its more ominous implications. Compounding the drama is the gradual realization that Knight has a strange history of his own: He's descended from an old German family of *shattenjagers*, or shadow hunters. It soon becomes obvious that Knight's destined to become a *shattenjager* himself, and dedicate his life to hunting supernatural evil. This creates both a terrific ending for the game, and a pretty neat basis for future Gabriel Knight adventures.

Adding depth to the game's excellent framework are some unique settings and a cast of memorable supporting characters. You'll travel from Louisiana to Germany and even Africa, and interact with people who are, on the whole, more fully developed than the secondary characters in most graphic adventures. And the game is considerably longer than many, giving you even more time to immerse yourself in its story and settings.

Considering the solid plot and cast, it's no surprise that the actual game mechanics are as good as they are. *Gabriel Knight* uses a stylized-but-familiar Sierra interface that never intrudes on game play. Knight moves smoothly to perform any action you assign him, even in those tricky action sequences where timing is everything.

Graphically, *Gabriel Knight* ranks among Sierra's best efforts, especially in its cut scenes and interludes. The music and sound are good, too. *Gabriel Knight* ships on both disk and CD-ROM, and the CD-ROM version makes pretty ambitious use of voice acting. Tim Curry plays Knight, Mark Hamill plays your policeman friend, and Efrem Zimbalist Jr. plays your old uncle Wolfgang. To tell you the truth, though, I enjoyed the game much more without the voice actors; I didn't think Curry was very good as Knight, and preferred my own "imagined" voice for him and most of the other characters. The one exception was *Star Trek* star Michael Dorn, who made for a pretty good Dr. John.

I enjoyed playing *Gabriel Knight*, and I'm already looking forward to the next game in this new series. Sure, the world of a *Shattenjager* can get a little hokey. But then I loved that old *Night Stalker* series with Darren McGavin, too.

CRITICAL PATH

Category: Multimedia Adventure

Publisher: Mechadeus

Developer: Media Vision, 47300 Bayside Parkway, Fremont CA 94538

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386DX/33 MHz CPU and CD-ROM drive	486DX/33, double-speed CD-ROM drive
4 MB RAM	8 MB RAM
10 MB Hard-drive space	14.5 MB Hard-drive space
SVGA (640 x 480 x 256)	SVGA (65,536 colors)
Windows 3.1, DOS 5.0 or higher	
Windows-compatible sound card	
Mouse	

Developers sure are having a heckuva time trying to figure out the best way to incorporate digitized video into games. One tack is to use video clips only at those moments — introductions, expository scenes, or climactic end-game sequences — when the player has no option for interaction anyway. But what about a game like *Critical Path*, which consists entirely of digitized video of actors shot on blue screen and superimposed on rendered backgrounds? How do you "interact" with pre-recorded video?

STEPHEN POOLE

The way *Critical Path* handles it is by limiting the amount of interaction. You can't initiate conversations with friend or foe, nor can you explore the game world in any way; in fact, you're plopped into one location and forced to voyeuristically *watch* the action on a teeny-tiny monitor. It's all pretty passive, in many ways more like a movie than a game. But whether you judge *Critical Path* as a movie, game, or hybrid of the two, you'll still leave it with one thought: This is too damn short!

Critical Path takes place in a post-Apocalyptic setting. You and three other soldiers have survived a massive nuclear exchange, and are flying in two helicopters to an island which you've learned is habitable. But when you pass over an uncharted island someone brings down both whirlybirds with missiles, killing two of your compatriots, leaving only you and the female pilot Kat alive.

You're wounded, but have managed to find your way to a control tower. From here you use your Military Communications Link to see what Kat sees; she can talk to you, but her com unit has been damaged and your responses to her are limited to yes and no answers, an alert signal, and a directional arrow to tell her which way to go. There's also a control panel where you can press buttons listed alphabetically or enter a three-digit code.

You also find the notebook of General Minh, the kingpin of the island. According to the manual, the notebook contains the "rabid ravings" of Minh, but they're not all *that* rabid — they're actually very thinly disguised instructions on how to use the control panel to perform nine different functions, from sounding an ear-piercing siren to firing a machine gun to activating an electric chair.

You've probably figured it out, but here's how the game works: Kat wanders into a dangerous scene, you punch in a code or press a button to save her, and sit back to see if you made the right decision. If you did, it's on to the next scene; if not, Kat loses one of her nine lives. The only problems facing you are figuring out what the various buttons do (something that shouldn't take more than five minutes, even for a novice), where each device is located, and when to punch them in (Minh can override your commands if you enter them too early).

There's also a sequence where Kat's been blinded and you must guide her by clicking on directional arrows as she moves along a catwalk. This is the most challenging part of the game, but it's also the most nonsensical — if she's blinded, wouldn't she *crawl* along the catwalk, feeling for those gaping holes she can fall through? You have to be pretty precise in *when* you click, too, and the overall result is that you feel frustrated rather than challenged.

As far as its multimedia elements are concerned, *Critical Path* earns high marks: The quality of the video, music, sound effects, and acting are all above average. But with game play reduced to punching buttons (and very few buttons at that), there's not enough interaction to satisfy veteran gamers. And players happy to click buttons and watch video clips will soon realize that there's not much here: Failure means watching the same video again, while success draws the entire affair to a quick and unsatisfying close.

Critical Path proves that Media Vision knows how to produce high-quality multimedia elements. If they can find a good way to incorporate them into a game, they'll have a winner on their hands.

POLICE QUEST 4: OPEN SEASON

Category: Graphic Adventure

Developer: Sierra On-Line

Publisher: Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485, Coursegold, CA 93614

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386DX/25 4MB RAM 22MB hard-drive space MS-DOS 5.0 or higher VGA Mouse	486SX/25 or faster Sound Blaster or compatible sound card

MATTHEW A. FIRME

On the box for *Police Quest 4: Open Season*, in big, block letters above the title, is the name Daryl F. Gates. Yes, *the* Daryl Gates, the former Los Angeles Chief of Police whose last years on the job were marked by such controversy. When Jim Walls (the ex-cop behind the first three *Police Quest* games) left to work for Tsunami, Sierra had to find a high-profile law-enforcement type to help sell the new *Police Quest*. And they've certainly succeeded.

Gates is credited as the author of *Open Season*, and Sierra's box copy would seem to indicate that his most important contributions to the project were realism and attention to police procedure. Sounds interesting, until you open the box and see the abridged LAPD manual that ships with the game. Just browsing through the many regulations might be enough to scare some players off. But fortunately, almost none of the stuff in the LAPD manual comes into direct play during the game. And while there are plenty of procedural details in *Open Season*, most are pretty straightforward. If you've played any of the previous *PQ* games, you won't have much trouble.

Another selling point, much-touted on the *PQ4* box, is the game's gritty, realistic look. Adding to that look are the use of digitized scenes shot on the streets of Los Angeles, and the contribution of "America's Most Wanted" producer Tammy Dargan as producer and director for *Open Season*. The result is very believable, with some quite memorable scenes. One very weird thing, though: while the game supports both VGA and SVGA, there's practically no difference between the two. In VGA, your icon is bigger and chunkier than in SVGA. But the game graphics seemed identical.

Unfortunately, that sought-after realism never creeps into the game's storyline. The game opens on an East L.A. back-alley, where your ex-partner has been found murdered. There are two Black witnesses standing there, and five upright law-enforcement types (one of whom, a patrolman, is Black — the only Black police officer in the game). The cops all deliver their lines in melodramatic, grammatically correct "Dragnet" speak, while the Black witnesses are incapable of anything but jive.

Perhaps the game's most fatal flaw, though, is the nonsensical serial-killer plot itself. The first two murder victims are cops — not the usual prey of serial killers. By the end of the game, as you close in on the killer, the author stoops to a series of unbelievable contrivances to force a final confrontation. But the final bit of absurdity, in which you have to lasso a stray dog who then drags you all over town and finally into the killer's basement, is such a cheap plot device that it absolutely destroys the game's lofty intentions. I'd already figured out who the killer was. I knew where he lived. Why couldn't I simply present the evidence to a judge and get a legal search warrant?

Open Season does have a few good action sequences, and some moments of real tension. But these are isolated by long stretches with absolutely no dramatic pacing or action. In fact, you may find yourself wishing there was more of that promised police detail, just so you'd have more to do.

If Gates did indeed write the story for *Open Season*, I'd have to say he should find something else to do with his spare time. I enjoyed the first three *Police Quest* games, but found this one to be a real disappointment. I hope Sierra will cut its losses, and find a new author for the next game. Let Gates endorse it, but please don't let him write it!

CYBERRACE

Category: Sci-fi racing sim

Publisher: Cyberdreams

Developer: Cyberdreams, 21243 Venture Blvd. Suite 230, Woodland Hills CA 91364

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386/20Mhz 4 MB RAM DOS 5.0 or higher 20 MB hard-drive space VGA	Sound Blaster or compatible sound card Joystick

T. LIAM MCDONALD

Cyberdreams is nothing if not ambitious. Last year they brought us *Darkseed*, one of the most hotly anticipated and disappointing games of the year. Now Cyberdreams is in our collective faces again, with a new Big Name Talent and a Hot New Game called *CyberRace*, all wrapped up in a package designed more for attention-getting than disk storage.

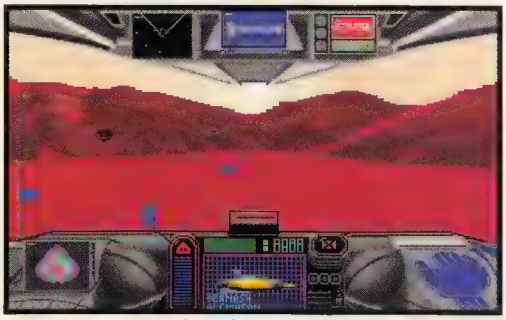
In *Darkseed*, Cyberdreams built their project around the work of H.R. Giger. This time the talent is world-renowned designer Syd Mead, whose futuristic visions grace such films as *Blade Runner*, *Tron*, and *Aliens*, as well as many other movie and tv projects, theme parks, automobiles, and airplanes. While Mr. Mead's credits are unassailable, his exact contribution to *CyberRace*, aside from his name, is unclear. The vehicles have a sharp-edged, futuristic feel (a la *Blade Runner*), but little else in this undistinguished project shows much real creativity — which leads me to believe the design is more Cyberdreams' than Sid Mead's.

After a long and tiring war, the Terran and Kaladasian Empires decide to shelve their armies and instead "race" each other to determine the victor. Whichever side wins gains control of a black hole, created in the course of the war. At the core of *CyberRace* is a futuristic racing simulation in which you drive Sleds —really fast sorta hovercraft-like things — around a course, trying to 1) come in first, and 2) blast the bejeezus out of anyone who gets in your way. Since there is no altitude control on the sleds, this is really just a car-racing sim with rockets.

The game does contain some attractive landscapes and sled graphics, although they're not enough to make up for the tedious gameplay. Through lap after mind-numbing lap you try to steer your little sled between *very* narrow pylons to avoid time penalties. Sometimes you get shot or hit a mine, making your sled spin around so that you don't know which way you're facing. Sometimes you get to blow away another sled, but the time it takes it takes can cost you the race.

What little character animation there is looks stiff and ham-handed, resembling something from *Barbie-Doll Theater*. There's an attempt at a story here, in which the stiff Barbie- and Ken-looking characters interact with Really Bad Guys. You play Clay Shaw, who's racing not only to save his girlfriend Alyssia from the evil clutches of Dobbs, but also to avenge his father's death at the hands of the sled racer Mugyor. Between races you can talk to a bookie named Booker, a saboteur named Freckles, an informant named Kalee, and...Oh, it just doesn't matter.

I tried, really I did. I even warmed to *CyberRace* a bit, kinda like the guys in Sing Sing warmed to the prison guards. Cyberdreams did everything in its power to promote and package an interesting game — everything, that is, except to *design* an interesting game. And all the advertising and flashy packaging in the world can't overcome that fact.



Worse yet, a lot of people are reporting problems with the game: crashes, sound dropping out, etc. CompuServe users have been reporting problems to Cyberdreams, but so far they haven't received much help. A CD-ROM version is also available, but Cyberdreams recommends you not bother trying to run it if you're using any disk compression, such as Double Space or Stacker. Unfortunately, that warning is in the game documentation, not on the package.

Actually, the *CyberRace* box perfectly sums up the game inside. It's flashy, but it doesn't work very well when you get it home.

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UNNATURAL SELECTION

Category: Strategy

Developer: Maxis

Publisher: Maxis, 2 Theatre Square, Orinda, CA 94563

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX or faster 640K RAM (EMS required for speech) DOS 3.3 or higher 15MB hard-drive space VGA	386DX/33 Mhz Sound Blaster or compatible sound card Mouse

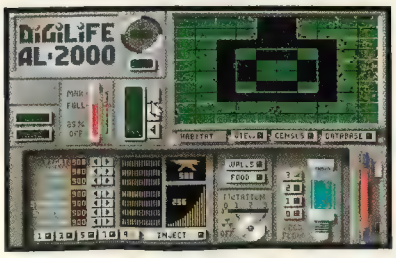
SELBY BATEMAN

Over the past several years, Maxis has earned a well-deserved reputation for innovation in its approach to gaming. Maxis titles such as *SimAnt* and *El Fish* might not look and feel like traditional games, but they do present a creative environment that rewards intelligence, curiosity, and a certain sense of open-ended playfulness. That's the essence of the Maxis philosophy of "software toys," and *UnNatural Selection* is very much in that tradition.

Basically, the game consists of two components. The first is a genetics laboratory in which you breed life forms called "theroids" — reptilianesque creatures that look something like mutant turtles on designer steroids. Using the DigiLife AL-2000 genetic engineering computer, you tinker with the theroids to breed for a range of characteristics such as speed, strength, stamina, and vision.

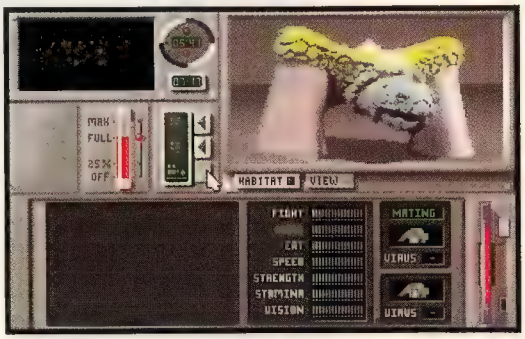
Select the "Independent Research" segment of the game, and you'll conduct your artificial life experiments in the lab — which is a good way to practice for the other part of *UnNatural Selection*.

The second component is a strategic battle game, which allows you to road-test your theroids in combat through a series of island encounters with enemy theroids. There are 24 islands in all, each with a different set of challenges. If you elect to play the "Top Secret Games" segment of *UnNatural Selection*, you'll use your theroids to battle through nine main islands.

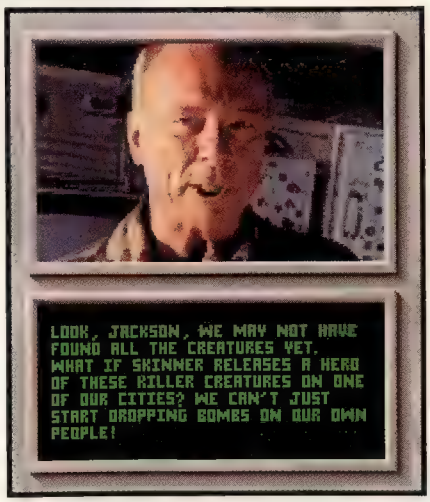


The theroid world is made up of Zips, the speedy ones; Hulks, the massively strong types; and Slugs, the slow but high-stamina variety. Your job is to breed various characteristics into the creatures and produce hybrids that are effective in battle. For example, you may want to have very aggressive, fast-moving theroids that can cover a lot of ground and hit the enemy quickly.

UnNatural Selection is a thorough creative environment that's strong on experimentation and strategy, but weak on action. The nuances of breeding the best possible theroids for the varying environments and enemies can take quite a while to master — and a lot of trial and error — as you tinker with food supplies, characteristic levels, radiation, etc.



The 132-page manual does a good job of setting out the research and battle possibilities. There are loads of details on virtually every aspect of game play, experimentation, battle strategy, genetic engineering, and lab activities. But the manual does frequently read like it was written by a committee of doctoral candidates: "The creatures are set up with enough SNI coagulates to leave a 'whole' corpse upon death, which will last until the next Food Resupply cycle (at which point the semi-permeable floor absorbs the excess)."


LOOK, JACKSON, WE MAY NOT HAVE FOUND ALL THE CREATURES YET. WHAT IF SKINNER RELEASES A HERD OF THESE KILLER CREATURES ON ONE OF OUR CITIES? WE CAN'T JUST START DROPPING BOMBS ON OUR OWN PEOPLE!

The player interface, graphics, sound effects and digitized speech are all first-rate. And the short mini-movie that introduces the plot of the battle section is cleverly carried out, if a bit overwritten. The clay-animation theroids you see from time to time on close-up view are quite well modeled — even when one of them rips the head off of an enemy.

All in all, *UnNatural Selection* offers a rich interactive environment in which to experiment. The only major drawback to the game is that after playing for awhile, a certain tedium starts to creep into the trial-and-error approach to breeding the "right" kinds of theroids. And, especially in battle mode, you don't have enough control over your theroid troops.

As a lab experimentation playground, *UnNatural Selection* is a solid piece of work that rewards the studious. But there probably isn't enough actual game play here for real action fans.

KRONOLOG: THE NAZI PARADOX

Category: Graphic Adventure

Developer: Castleworks Gameware

Publisher: Merit Software, 13707 Gamma Road, Dalls TX 75244

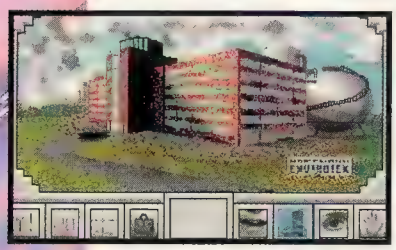
Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/16 MHz	486DX/25 MHz
2 MB RAM	4 MB RAM
25 MB Hard-drive space	AdLib, Pro Audio Spectrum, Sound Blaster, or compatible sound cards
DOS 5.0	
VGA	
Mouse	

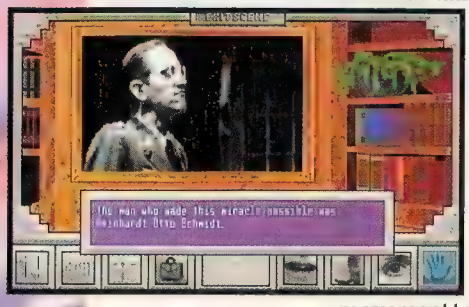
STEPHEN POOLE

You have to feel for a new development team like Castleworks Gameware, going up against graphic-adventure heavyweights like Lucas–Arts, Sierra, and Legend. I was really hoping that Castleworks' first release, *Kronolog: The Nazi Paradox*, would mark an auspicious debut for the fledgling company. Sadly, I was disappointed.

Set in 2020, *Kronolog* is based on an alternate reality which came about as a result of German scientists winning the race to develop atomic weapons in WWII. After the bombing of Boston in 1945, America surrendered and the Nazis turned the U.S. into a colony of sorts, dubbed the North American Democratic Alliance (NADA — that's a joke, amigo?). After 75 years of Nazi control, the country faces increasing food shortages and severe pollution problems.



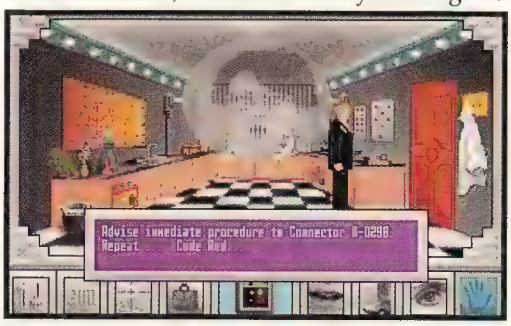
It's a good (if not unique) backdrop for an adventure game, but game play focuses more on *how* the Nazis developed the bomb first — and that brings in time travel, a whole 'nother can of worms indeed. Here's where the story gets a little muddled: The Nazis were able to time travel by stealing a magic crystal from a scientist and his Native American assistant. I assume the sequence of events is explained properly, but I got so confused trying to keep track of the ping-ponging narrative that I gave up on sorting it all out.



You play as Dr. Mark Hoffman, a scientist who's developed bacteria that devour toxic waste. You're fairly well-respected by the authorities, but in reality you're also a member of the "Unknowns," a resistance movement trying to topple the Nazis from power. And minutes into the game, you learn that your son, Phillip, is also involved in some anti-government activities when you find his name on a termination order at NADA headquarters.

Several devices are used to make the world of NADA feel authentic. Swastikas adorn the interiors of various government buildings, but the operative word here is interiors — you're only shown one or two exterior shots of this allegedly decaying state. That's just not enough to create a game world that will suspend your disbelief.

You also carry a personal information manager that contains current newspaper clippings and a history of the past 75 years. But using it is frustrating: After going two or three levels into a section, reading an item, and selecting "Return to Previous Menu," you're returned *all* the way back to the *main* menu, where you have to start the process all over again. Maybe this realistically depicts the way a PIM developed in an authoritarian state would work, but it sure is clumsy for a PC game.



Exploring the game world via the four action icons — Look, Talk, Walk, and Use/Pick Up — is tricky, to say the least. Select Use/Pick Up and click on an object not within immediate reach, for example, and you get the message "You can't reach it from here;" the game should realize that when you do that you're trying to say is "*Walk* over and Use/Pick Up the object." *Kronolog*'s interface simply adds an extra step to the exploration process, forcing you to continually guide Hoffman through each scene.

This gripe isn't unique to *Kronolog*, but it's still valid — especially since moving and positioning Hoffman might be the game's biggest challenge. Trying to get our doughy hero to stand in the right location can be maddening, as he dutifully trots back and forth between the front and back of the scene; other times you can click and click with no response whatsoever. Timed sequences can be especially aggravating, due to the unwieldy movement interface.

The graphics are generally sub-par (the looped video clips are almost comical), the voice-acting is mediocre at best, there are some odd logic triggers (you have to address a barrel you're going to hide in *before* you find out whether it can even be opened), and selecting "Quit" takes you *immediately* to DOS — as well as 40-column mode and reboot time, at least when using a Cirrus Logic VLB graphic card.

In short, *Kronolog* has too many flaws for gamers to cope with. Let's just hope Castleworks irons out the problems for its next game.

COMMAND ADVENTURE STARSHIP

Category: Strategy/Adventure

Developer: Future Visionary, Inc.

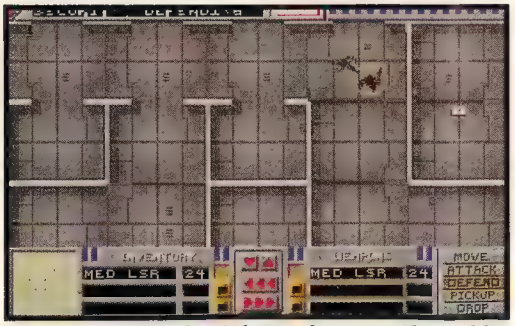
Publisher: Merit, 13707 Gamma Rd. Dallas, TX 75244

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/33MHz 2 MB RAM 18 MB Hard-drive space VGA Mouse	Sound Blaster or compatible sound cards

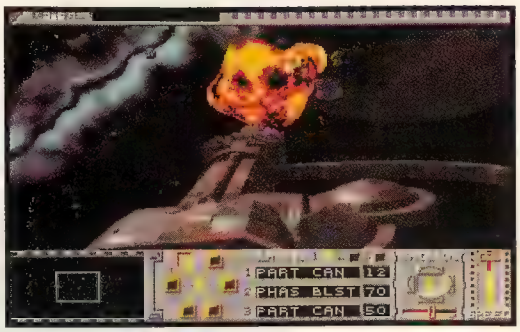
TRENT C. WARD

With all the recent progress in graphics design, a lot of companies have started taking the "If it looks better, it is better" approach to game development. Now I love a good-looking game as much as the next person. But too many recent titles have been long on "good-looking" and short on "game." And Merit's new *Command Adventure Starship* is a perfect example. Its incredibly smooth, cinematic transition sequences are intermingled with bland and difficult gameplay. To paraphrase Douglas Adams, the game "looks like a fish, moves like a fish, but steers like a cow."



You play as the commander of a huge starship, and your mission is to conquer all 50 planets in your section of the galaxy. But there are a number of other space faring races trying to do the same thing, so you'll have to battle them both in space and on each planet's surface.

When *Starship* is good, it's very good. The ray-traced starships are some of the best I've ever seen. When you jump into hyperspace, land on a planet, or destroy an enemy craft, you're treated to a spectacular animated sequence. Besides being nice to look at, though, there scenes also share another trait: a lack of interactivity. No matter how attractive these animations are, most players are just going to bypass them once they've seen them a few times — and then, all you're left with is the game itself. It's a shame that some of the time spent creating those great graphics wasn't invested in better game design.



Both space and ground combat are crippled by the same problem: terrible control. On the ground, you can control only one member of your landing party at a time, with no way to manipulate mass movements. Other members of your party will attempt to defend themselves when under attack — if you've gone through and armed each one of them individually — but the computer intelligence guiding them is awful. Computer-controlled team members will routinely shoot one another, and never seem to win a battle against computer opponents. Getting the character you control to aid fellow party members can be a real chore. The screen scrolls at an unbelievably high rate of speed, making it very hard to target an opponent who's wandered out of your field of view (this happens frequently). In addition, each time your character completes an order, you must select the action you wish them to perform again; for example, you must select Move, then click on the spot you wish to move to, then select Move again, and pick the next point you wish to move to. All of this, in the midst of a heated fire fight, can be almost infuriating.

Space combat isn't quite as bad, but simultaneously selecting shield strength, activating weapons, and choosing your ship's heading can be pretty tough. If you *are* fortunate enough to destroy an enemy ship (and not be attacked immediately by another) you have the option of trying to capture the ship by using...you guessed it...the ground-combat system.

That pretty much sums up the game. You fight in space, you fight on the ground. Any monetary gain is turned into more weaponry for more fights. All that frustrating combat never rewards you with new game-playing opportunities, and the whole thing quickly becomes repetitious.

But again, *Command Adventure Starship* looks great. If you want a game that shows off your new computer's impressive graphics, then this one fits the bill. But if you're looking for fun, interactivity, and originality, you'd be better off leaving this one on the shelf.

ELECTRIC READING LAND

Category: Educational

Developer: D.C. True, Ltd.

Publisher: D.C. True, Ltd., 1840 Oak Ave., Evanston, IL 60201

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX or better DOS 3.1 or higher VGA 640K RAM Hard drive mouse	Sound Blaster or compatible sound cards

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

This is a basic reading-skills program aimed at children three to seven years old, and hung on a 1960's, Jimi Hendrix (Electric Lady Land — get it?) storyline gimmick intended to keep parents entertained as they explore the program with their children.

Your guide throughout the program is a cute little green alien named Jimi Jupiter, who receives an SOS from the worn-out Imagination Space Station. The ISS is about out of juice and it asks Jimi — and through him, the kids playing the game — to recharge it by creating a story. New lines of cute doggerel ("A rat took a flat hat that was on the fat cat...") are automatically added to the story as the child progresses through each increasingly challenging level of play.

Once on the the bridge of the ISS, you can click on three different activities. The easiest is called Phonics Toy, in which the child clicks on one letter or pair of letters at the top of the screen, and another at the bottom. If he or she makes a real word, one point goes into the Earth Words scoring box; if a nonsense word is created, a point goes into the scoring box for Martian Words.

In Dino Beach, the intermediate level, players must match the object or sound that appears on a surfboard with one of four choices arrayed on the beach. Each successful match is rewarded with a lightning-bolt checkmark and a "Buh-dah-BUM!" rim-shot. On the third and most challenging level, Dragon Park, the child must make more sophisticated choices.

Since the underlying *purpose* of these drills is to create a story that will reinvigorate the space station, it would have been nice if the child occasionally were rewarded by progress reports. Unfortunately, you must exit the

games and return to the bridge screen to see how you're doing.

No doubt this program will enhance reading skills, provided the repetition required to make substantial progress doesn't overwhelm your child. The goofy word-play of the narrative is entertaining, yes, but the child must go through more than an hour of exercises to add even a few lines to the story.

The program has other problems, too. The mouse-driven interface has an unpleasantly mushy feel to it — I frequently had to click two or three times on certain screens to activate something. Moreover, the usefulness of the program is really at the mercy of your sound card; if yours does not reproduce digitized speech clearly, then both you and the child will have a hard time distinguishing initial consonant sounds.

There are a number of glaring typographical and grammatical errors in both the manual and the on-line "Parents' and Teachers' Guide," and it's truly unsettling to find them in a program ostensibly dedicated to teaching youngsters to read.

In many ways, the 1960s stuff is downright bizarre. Many of the Discovery items you click on to activate little animated sequences are based on pop icons from the '60s, as are the animated characters' names (Jimi, Mick, Keith, and a dragon named Santana). Click on Peter Fonda's red-white-and-blue motorcycle helmet from *Easy Rider*, and you get an animated peace sign that says, "Nice pad, man!" Far out. There are even a couple of quavering, poorly digitized measures of Jimi Hendrix singing "Power of Soul."

These nostalgic vignettes are intended, according to the box copy, to "bring back wonderful memories that parents can share with their children."

Yeah, sure. *YOU* try explaining the opening scene of the *2001: A Space Odyssey* to a six-year-old.

INNOCENT UNTIL CAUGHT

Category: Graphic Adventure

Developer: Divide By Zero

Publisher: Psygnosis, 675 Massachusets Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02139

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/20 MHz	386SX/25M MHz
1 MB RAM	2 MB RAM
18 MB Hard-drive space	AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster/Pro or compatible sound cards
Memory manager	Mouse
VGA	

BERNIE YEE

Yet another futuristic graphic adventure has hit store shelves, this time from a company better known for its furry hobbit-like creatures than any characters even remotely resembling Roger Wilco or Rex Nebular. *Innocent Until Caught* is being published here by Pysgnosis — of *Lemmings* fame — but it was developed by European developer Divide By Zero. In case you didn't know, "divide by zero" is an error message, and after playing the game I get the feeling that Psygnosis should have taken the developer's name at face value.

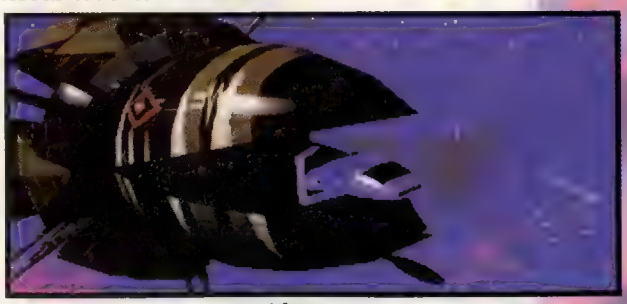
Innocent Until Caught (*IUC*) chronicles the travels of Jack, an interstellar thief and ne'er-do-well. In a Capone-esque strategy, the authorities nab him not for specific crimes, but failure to pay taxes on his ill-gotten earnings. All of this is revealed in a nicely done introductory sequence, at the end of which it's revealed that Jack — you — have only a short time to come up with the huge amount of back taxes.

Technically, *IUC* fares well. The graphics are fine — dark and moody, though not quite as nice as some of Sierra's almost painted VGA visuals. A convenient automap screen shows exits from the room, and a point-and-click icon command bar sits next to the list of your inventory items. The sound is pretty standard fare as well.

But *IUC*'s memory requirements are unbelievably onerous: With 620,432 bytes free, I *still* didn't have enough memory, despite the box's half-true assertion that 570K base memory is required (that's for PC sound only). I had to resort to QEMM v 7.0's Stealth mode to free up enough RAM — 639,008 — to coax *IUC* into running. And to what end? Though there are some technical niceties, *IUC* hardly uses all that memory to create a state-of-the-art game — there's nary a digitized effect to be heard.

While pretty enough, *IUC* is proof that designing an adventure game is more complicated than it looks. The game begins in a spaceport city, and you have many different places to visit and many colorful people to talk to. The problem is that there are almost too many things to do at first; you're not quite sure where to begin. Couple that with the fact that the solutions to many of the puzzles are rather obscure, and you'll find yourself wandering around, completely unsure of what to do next.

From the beginning of *IUC*, you're never sure of what tone the designers are trying to establish. There are many humorous touches in the introduction, but the game itself seems to have little or no sense of humor. And there's also no real reason to like our protagonist, Jack — a big problem, since he is your alter ego. He's a weasely petty thief who seems to be finally getting his comeuppance. Even stupid and sleazy heroes, like Rex Nebular and Leisure Suit Larry, have some self-deprecating, self-effacing charm that made them likeable. And those games had a consistent sense of humor, too.



IUC isn't an awful game. But there are so many other excellent adventure games available that it's hard to justify spending money, time, and effort on a merely passable adventure like *IUC*. The truth is that adventure-game design just isn't as "mature" in Europe as it is here. That's not to say that European programmers are somehow inferior to their American counterparts. No, this is a question of design, not technology. The sophisticated electronic entertainment market is defined here. Until European (and some American) developers can get a handle on some of the new game-design conventions being created here — like a game world made up of a linear series of open-ended environments as in Dynamix's *Riftwar: Betrayal at Krondor*, or the challenging yet forgiving world of *Day of the Tentacle* — all the smooth point-and-click interfaces or rotoscoped animation won't mean a dime, not even to a hard-up-for-cash tax evader like Jack.

ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS III

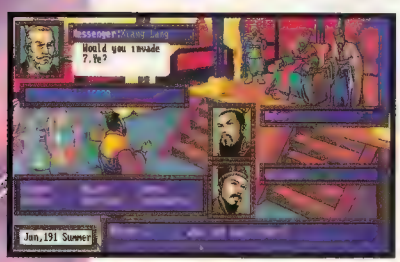
Category: Historical Simulation

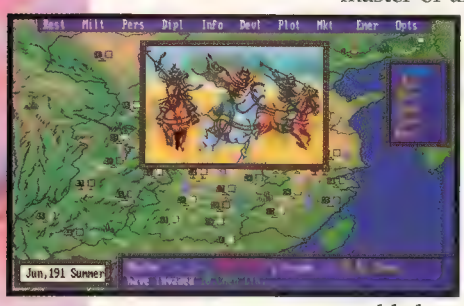
Developer: Koei

Publisher: Koei, One Bay Plaza, Suite 540, 1350 Bayshore Highway, Burlingame CA 94010

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286	386SX/16
640K RAM	Sound Blaster or compatible sound cards
4 MB hard-drive space	Mouse
VGA	





When *Romance of the Three Kingdoms III* landed on my desk, my initial reaction was "What? *Again?!*" Since becoming addicted to the first edition of *Romance* back in 1988, I've logged hundreds of hours in 11th-Century China playing both the original and *Romance II*. Some of the game's many characters have become old friends; if I passed Cao Cao or Liu Bei on the street, I would recognize them and wave hello. But a third *Romance?* I wondered if this newest version would be fresh enough, enticing enough, to lure me back into its labyrinth of economic planning, court intrigue, and countless battles. It was.

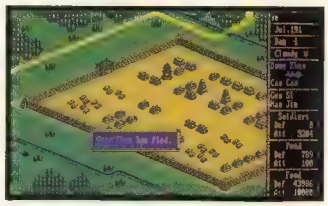
WILLIAM R. TROTTER

A quick reprise for those of you who aren't familiar with the series: *Romance* is set in a turbulent and violent period of Chinese history, ushered in by the fall of the Han Dynasty. With the collapse of imperial order, China fragmented into dozens of fiefdoms, and warlords carved out their own empires by allying with or absorbing their neighbors.

Your goal in *Romance III* is to become the master of all China. The game allows for fairly sophisticated battlefield tactics, as well as numerous forms of Machiavellian skullduggery (bribes, sabotage, assassinations, fake messages, etc.), and requires long, patient, development of economic and agricultural resources before you can undertake any sweeping campaigns.

The geographic scale of the game is vast, and the time scale dynastic. In the first two games, you could choose to become any one of 33 historical warlords, each with his own characteristics. In this new version, you also get six new characters, *plus* the ability to create and name your own character.

In addition, there are several new scenarios and the option to play either a historic or a fictional game. The historic game generally follows actual events, while the fictional type is open-ended. *Romance III* incorporates more detailed rules for the delegation of authority to a subordinate than did the previous games, a subtler system for economic development and trade, and a very useful command that lets you rank all your subordinates according to various character traits, such as war ability, political ability, charm, and intelligence.



Perhaps the most striking difference between this new version and its illustrious predecessors is in the battle screens. Gone are the chunky hexes with their abstract terrain and unit symbols. Instead, Koei gives us lush, screen-filling, cinematic views of terrain, castles, and rivers, and troops that actually look like small armies. Combat is more sophisticated than ever, and includes possible ambush attacks, ranged fire from crossbows, cavalry charges, and battering-ram attacks on fortified gates. The sound effects, incidentally, are a lot of fun—especially the "buzz saw" racket that accompanies melee combat.

Also included, for the first time, are naval battles involving three kinds of galleys, ranging from light, fast, and cheap to big, slow, and expensive. Empires with navies can strike at long range, deep behind the enemy's front-line cities.

Along with the gorgeous VGA graphics, Koei has redesigned the interface so that everything is now smoothly mouse-driven. If the numerous data screens are blocking your view, you need only click on their upper left corners and they vanish until you click again.

Romance has always been a classy game, and this new version adds more than cosmetic changes. When all is said and done, though, it's still basically the same game, and if you've already gone through a period of severe addiction to one of the earlier versions, you might decide to pass this one by.

On the other hand, there are thousands of newcomers to PC gaming, and an even larger number of young players just getting into the field who probably haven't played the earlier versions (or maybe have only seen the Nintendo editions). And to them, I recommend *Romance III* without hesitation.

SID & AL'S INCREDIBLE TOONS

Category: Puzzle

Developer: Jeff Tunnell

Publisher: Sierra/Dynamix, P.O. Box 600, Coarsegold, CA 93614-0600

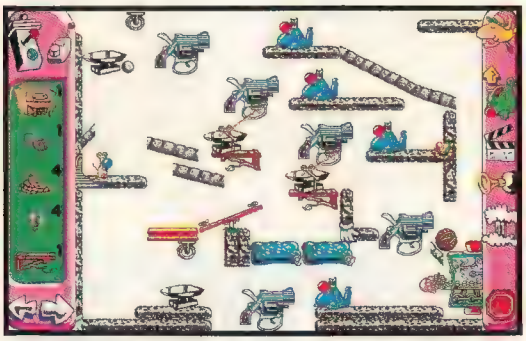
Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386/25MHz 2 MB RAM 5 MB hard-drive space DOS 5.0 or later VGA	Sound Blaster or compatible sound card Mouse

SELBY BATEMAN

We've had suspicions for some time that Jeff Tunnell and his game production team are a bit on the loopy side. But it takes a truly wacky universe such as *Sid & Al's Incredible Toons* to show how really *out there* they are.

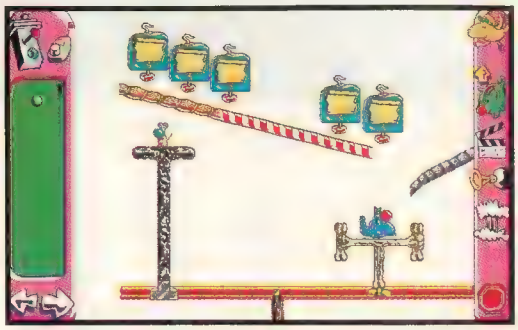
From the folks who brought us *The Incredible Machine* and *The Even More Incredible Machine* — with their hundreds of different Rube Goldberg-style puzzles — now come Sid Mouse and Al E. Cat in a melee of demented cartoon puzzles. You don't start to realize just how many bells, whistles, buzzers, honkers,



floating anvils, trans-roto-matics, and related items and parts are packed into *Sid & Al's Incredible Toons* until you've played for awhile. There are dozens and dozens of critters, gadgets, thing-a-ma-bobs, balls, canisters, padlocks, see-saws, and other strange building blocks. Each of them can serve one or more purposes, and trying to understand which does what is a great deal of the fun.

You're presented with visual puzzles on any of four different, progressively difficult levels: Cake Walk (a total of 30 tutorial puzzles); All Brawn, No Brains (20 slightly tougher puzzles); Really, Really Hard (well, you get the picture — 25 toughies); and Looney Bin! (25 monster puzzles!). On each level beyond the first, some of the puzzles are locked or double-locked — meaning that you can't get to them until you solve all the other puzzles on that level. There's also a Hometoons area, where you can design your own incredible toon puzzles. They can be as complex or as simple as you wish, and you have access to all of the tools and items you've used in the preset puzzles.

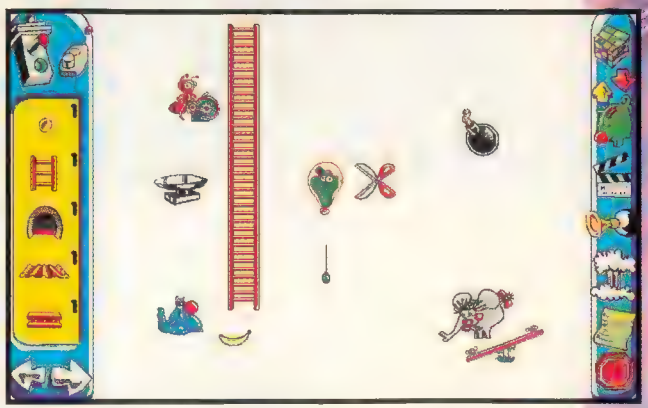
The manual is chock-full of handy information, all presented in a highly visual, comic manner. But one of the keys to getting the most out of *Sid & Al* is to jump right in on the tutorials and start learning the way this wacky world of puzzles works. The tutorials will introduce you to all of the



puzzle parts, so make sure you play through each of them.

There are implements in *Sid & Al* that don't exist in the real world — but ought to. Take the trans-roto-matic, for example. It changes "translational" motion (back and forth) into rotational movement (circular). So you can connect the trans-roto-matic to a gear or conveyor belt and change its function to meet your puzzle requirements. But be careful. After the first level, some items are thrown into each puzzle that really won't help you solve anything — and you have to figure out which are useful, and which aren't.

You can modify many of the puzzle parts once you place them on the screen. An accordion icon lets you stretch a part to the right, while a worm icon stretches a part to the left. The turtle icon flips a part left to right and right to left. In all there are seven basic manipulating parts, seven more pro-parts that can be modified, and a computer icon that permits you to change the function of a pro-part.



Add it all together, and you've got one huge puzzlefest. For puzzle fans, *Sid & Al* is a terrific playground with enough wacky humor to keep things funny as well as interesting. But unless you're one *hot* puzzle-solver, plan on buying the Dynamix hint book. You'll need it.

THE PATRICIAN

Category: Strategy/Resource Management

Developer: Ascon

Publisher: Readysoft, 30 Wertheim Court, Suite 2
Richmond Hill, Ontario Canada L4B 1B9

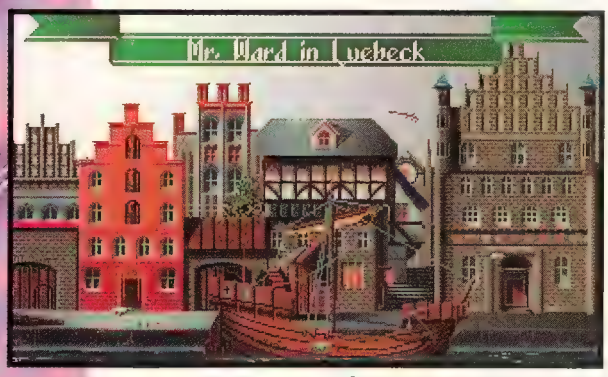
Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/12 MHz	386SX/16MHz or better
640KB RAM	Sound Blaster or compatible
4 MB hard-drive space	sound card
VGA video card.	Mouse

TRENT C. WARD

In fourteenth century Germany, a union of wealthy merchants called the Hanseatic League managed to build a considerable powerbase, controlling cities and enjoying privileges once reserved for the nobility.

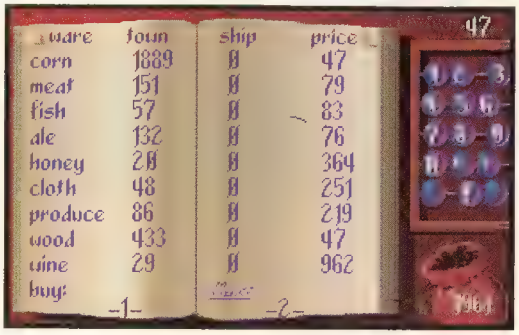
In Ready–soft's new game *The Patrician*, you play as one of these merchants, and you'll work to place yourself at the head of the League through resource management, wily politics — and when necessary, subterfuge and deceit.



You start the game as a merchant in one of six Hanseatic towns, and after choosing your character's sex and coat of arms, you're ready to get started. Right from the beginning, *The Patrician* show itself as more than just an exercise in collecting cash. In addition to buying goods where they're cheap and selling them where prices are higher, you must keep a constant eye on the fragile economies of the towns where you trade. Sell only luxury items in a town, for example, and the people of that town won't have the raw materials they need to produce other goods you might later buy there, robbing you of a potential trade resource later.

In addition to these economic concerns, you'll have to build your social and political standing. By giving donations and hosting feasts, you'll try to be elected mayor of one of the towns — but this is just a stepping stone to even greater power. Your eventual goal is to become the Alderman of the Hanseatic League itself. And as though all this weren't enough to worry about, marriage brokers constantly offer you different brides or grooms, pirates attack your trade convoys, and you have to keep up with the needs of your workmen.

Tracking so many details at once can be a mammoth task, and the job's not made any easier by the game's often-vague manual. Although a great deal of time and research obviously went into the historical documentation, there's precious



little about how to *play* the game. The complex game play, combined with the lack of any kind useful instruction or tutorial, may cause many players to give up before they have a chance to experience the good things this game has to offer.

And *The Patrician* does have a lot going for it. Each port scene is like a painting, and though most towns look alike, some buildings appropriate only to specific locales are thrown in to add variety. The music—a varying, appropriately medieval melody — is subtle and unobtrusive, and helps add to the feel of the game by changing to mirror each new situation. There are nice animations throughout the game, things like townspeople dancing, workers building, and sea gulls zipping by in the background. *The Patrician*'s designers went out of their way make this a very pleasing game to look at and listen to.

All things considered, *The Patrician* is a good game. It's complex economic model and multiplayer option give it a lot of replay value, and random events such as shipwrecks and spice fleets keep the game fresh and different each time. But

the amount of time you'll have to spend just learning how to play is a real problem, as is the poor documentation.

The Patrician isn't for everyone. But if you're a patient person looking for a good resource management title that'll challenge you for a long time to come, this one's worth serious consideration.

REBEL ASSAULT

Category: Arcade Action

Publisher: LucasArts

Developer: LucasArts, P.O. Box 10307, San Rafael, CA 94912

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386/33MHz	486/25MHz
MS-DOS 5.0 or higher	Supported sound card
4 Megs RAM	ThrustMaster Pro FCS
Joystick or mouse	
256-color VGA	
CD-ROM MPC level 1	

SCOTT WOLF

George Lucas' *Star Wars* is the phenomenon that will not die. Sixteen years after the original film debuted, the public's appetite for goods and services from the *Star Wars* universe remains unabated. Witness the remarkable success of LucasArts' *X-Wing* and its add-ons, and now the CD-ROM-only arcade extravaganza of *Rebel Assault*.

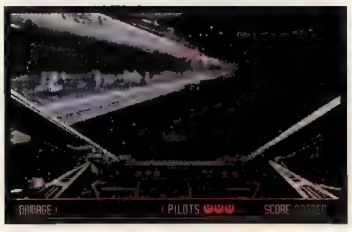
Before we go any further, however, it's important to point out the difference between a full-blown flight simulation and a dedicated arcade-style blaster. This is not a strategic campaign scenario, heavily dependent on decision making and tactics; much like coin-op games such as *Afterburner*, *G-LOC*, and *Starblade*, *Rebel Assault* doesn't permit you to fly wherever you like. Instead, your flight path is fixed, and allows only for subtle maneuvering — and infuriatingly schizophrenic control over your weapons.

Yep, there's no denying that *Rebel Assault*'s control system is almost universally despised, even by players who've managed to finish the game. With a standard analog joystick, the cursor is simultaneously oversensitive and unresponsive, frequently leading to vicious bouts of overcompensation and fiery premature deaths. Strangely enough, the ThrustMaster Pro FCS, which fared relatively poorly with *X-Wing*, seems to be the ideal controller for *Rebel Assault*. The fact that it requires extra effort to move to its limits and doesn't spring back to dead center serves *Rebel Assault* well. But even with the Pro FCS, you'll need a healthy dose of the Force to finish the game.

Rebel Assault plays out like a *Star Wars* mini-movie divided into 15 chapters, from flight training on Tatooine to the climactic Death Star trench run. A password is revealed after every 3 or 4 chapters so that play can be resumed without having to start over from scratch, but a code for each individual chapter would have been much nicer. You'll meet an assortment of characters, and during the course of the game you'll pilot a T-16 Skyhopper, T-47 Snowspeeder, A-Wing and X-Wing starfighters, and shoot it out on foot against a company of stormtroopers inside the rebel base on Hoth.

You've never seen a game like this on a home computer before. While *X-Wing* made liberal use of highly detailed cut scenes, *every* scene in *Rebel Assault* looks just as good, or better, than the digitized *Star Wars* movie footage interspersed with the action. *Rebel Assault* features more than 300 megabytes of animation, sound effects by Skywalker Sound, a digital soundtrack featuring music by John Williams (performed by the London Symphony Orchestra) and original dialogue recorded by a professional cast (but not those from the film trilogy).

Easy, normal, and hard difficulty levels are available, though hard should be called "I am quite clearly insane:" It does away with such amenities as target designator boxes, while noticeably increasing the enemy's lethality. And don't expect your wingmen to be of much help — they talk a good fight, but they never go so far as to actually open fire on anything. With few exceptions, success is entirely dependent on you and you alone.



One interesting option is for the player, referred to only as "Rookie 1," to be portrayed both visually and aurally as either male or female. It's a pretty shrewd tack for enticing the gals into battle, and the Rebellion needs every pilot it can get!

For me, *Rebel Assault* conveys a more visceral sense of participation in the Alliance's struggle against the Empire than does *X-Wing*, and provides many moments of genuine exhilaration, particularly in the ground-based Hoth chapters. It's not without its irritations, but once you get the hang of it, *Rebel Assault* can be a sheer delight to play.

LUCKY'S CASINO ADVENTURES

Category: Casino Simulation

Developer: Destiny Software

Publisher: QQP, 495 Highway 202, Flemington, NJ 08822

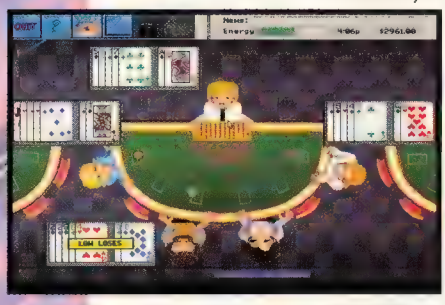
Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286 or better	386SX/16 MHz
640K RAM	AdLib, Sound Blaster, Roland, or compatible sound cards
DOS 3.3	Mouse
5 MB Hard-drive space	
SVGA	

JOSEPH NOVICKI

Games — and lots of em' — are what *Lucky's Casino Adventure* is all about. All the most popular casino games are here — Blackjack, Craps, Roulette, Slots, and Video Poker — plus more exotic affairs like Baccarat, Red Dog, Caribbean Stud, Pai Gow Poker, and Seven Card Texas Hold'em (my favorite), just to name a few.

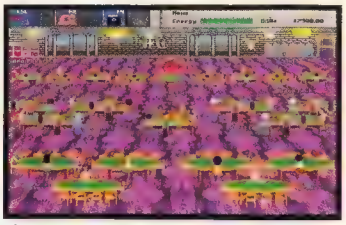
There are three ways to play *LCA*: Single Games, Tournaments, and the Three Week Vacation. Your play is rated in the latter two, adding a sense of challenge even during mindless affairs like slots.



Regardless of the mode you choose, you have to select a face to represent you and type in a name. You can select from among 14 cardbacks, each representing a fictitious casino you can visit. You can also change to a four-color suit (red, black, green, and blue) for easier viewing.

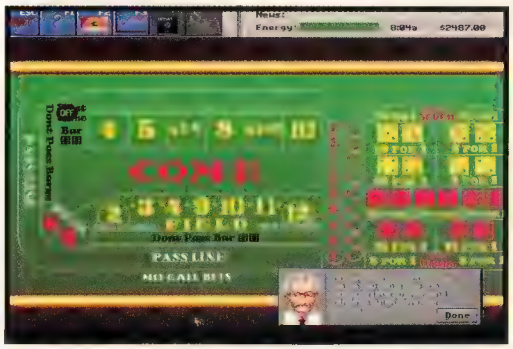
Single Game mode simply starts you out with a $10,000 bankroll to play away at your favorite games. Tournaments consist of a variety of games played in stages, and are a great way to familiarize yourself with all the different casino action available in *LCA*. The tournaments have different themes, so you can enjoy the challenge of rated play while sticking to your favorites: "Strategist's Holiday," for example, features games like blackjack, craps, and 5-card stud; "Lucky's Luck" focuses on games of chance like slots, Big Six wheel, and roulette; "Poker's Delight" is a collection of poker varieties (obviously); and "Mish Mash" is a little bit of everything.

The Three Week Vacation is the more elaborate way to play. You start your trip with $2,500 and a book of coupons redeemable at various casinos. Besides trying to stay in the black for the three-week duration, you've got to make sure you get enough food and rest by purchasing meals and rooms, which vary in cost at each casino. Running a little short of cash? Then hop on down to Crazy Mike's Pawn Shop. He'll be real interested in your watch, jacket, and boots, but once you've used them there's no use heading back. And once your money's gone you must leave town and end your vacation.



The sheer number of games is impressive and clearly *LCA's* strong point, but a number of weaknesses are also rooted here. There's a host of quirks and inconsistencies to contend with, due largely to the fact that Destiny chose to use the same interface for laying and removing bets in every game. It works okay in some of the simpler games, but it's very clumsy when playing Craps or Roulette, or when you bet anything other than multiples of $100. Rules for each game are available, but there's no tutor — unfortunate when you consider the large number of games.

Much of this is forgivable, but a couple of things really surprised me. Come and free-odds bets in Craps are not treated correctly; the game also lets you draw more than one card when splitting aces at the Blackjack table, which is unheard of in Vegas or Atlantic City. In Poker, going "all-in" with your last dollar is completely mishandled — sometimes you *lose* money by winning



the hand! And you can't select the number of computer opponents at the multi-player gaming tables. It makes you wonder how much playtesting was done on the game, or even if the programmers fully understood some of the games' rules.

But *Lucky's Casino Adventure* still offers a lot for casino game players. After all, where else can you play Red Dog, Keno and Pai Gow Poker? If improvements were made in the interface and adherence to common rules, and if a decent tutorial were included, it would receive considerably more of my playing time. In the end, though, I still prefer other programs (most notably *Beat the House* by Spirit of Discovery, winner of a PC Entertainment 1993 Excellence Award) when it comes to the basic casino games.

OCEANS BELOW

Category: Educational

Developer: Amazing Media

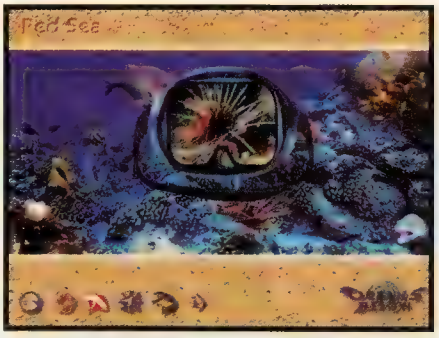
Publisher: Software Toolworks, 60 Leveroni Court, Novato, CA 94949

Rating:

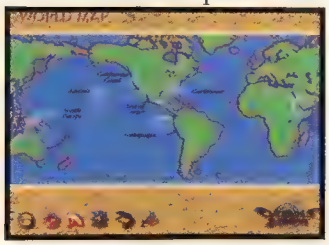
REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386DX/33 MPC-compatible CD-ROM drive 1 MB RAM DOS 5.0 SVGA Sound Blaster, Pro Audio Spectrum, or compatible sound card Mouse	486DX/33 Double-speed CD-ROM drive

Oceans Below seeks to take you along for dives in some of the most exotic locations in the world, exploring life beneath the waves.

This multimedia product uses digitized photos and video coupled with audio narration in an attempt to put you in the diver's suit, but it just doesn't quite work. There are some pretty scenes to see, and lots of information about sea life, but *Oceans Below* doesn't "leave you breathless," as the copy on the box claims.



From a world map, you can choose one of seven areas of the world to explore -- the South Pacific, Hawaii, the California coast, the Sea of Cortez, the Galapagos Islands, the Caribbean and the Red Sea. Some regions have more than one dive site, bringing the total number of dives in the program to seventeen.



When you visit a site, you're treated to a nice topside photograph. A short video provides an overview of the area. When you're ready to take the plunge, you see a video of divers jumping in and descending. Once at the sea floor, a full-screen photo serves as a menu for finding out more about the animals found there.

Clicking on a fish or other animal brings up a small video screen, cleverly framed in a dive mask. The video clips, though somewhat grainy, offer an informative look at the animals that inhabit the site. Once you've finished checking out the sea life, it's time to ascend and watch another video clip of divers rising to the surface.

That's about it. The text on the box makes some lofty claims, calling *Oceans Below* "the only multimedia diving experience that plunges you into a virtual scuba environment." Don't believe it. *Oceans Below* does provide an interesting peek at life beneath the waves, but there's certainly no "you-are-there" quality to this scuba environment. If that's what you're looking for, you're probably better off subscribing to National Geographic or watching the Discovery Channel.

— Lee Buchanan

SMOKIN' GUNS

Category: Arcade action

Developer: Twin Dolphin Games

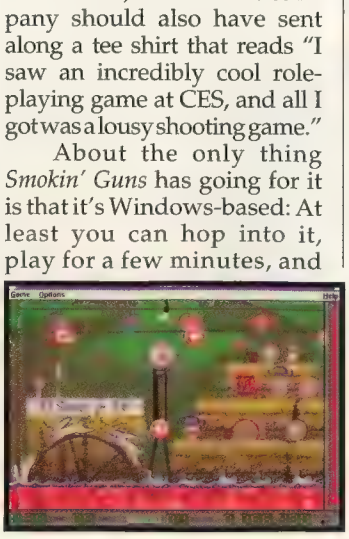
Publisher: Twin Dolphin Games, 220 Twin Dolphin Drive, Suite B, Redwood Shores CA 94065

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386DX/25 MHz Windows 3.1 w/ 4 MB RAM 7 MB hard-drive space SVGA Windows-compatible sound card Mouse	486SX/25 MHz

We first heard about Twin Dolphin at the 1993 Summer CES, when they showed us a rough demo of *Forgotten Castle: The Awakening*, a first-person fantasy role-playing game that boasted some *hot* 3-D animation. But the release of *Forgotten Castle* has been postponed indefinitely, so instead of debuting with a potentially groundbreaking RPG, Twin Dolphins has released *Smokin' Guns*. And after playing it for a few rounds, I felt like the company should also have sent along a tee shirt that reads "I saw an incredibly cool role-playing game at CES, and all I got was a lousy shooting game."

About the only thing *Smokin' Guns* has going for it is that it's Windows-based: At least you can hop into it, play for a few minutes, and get back to work (or at least to a better game).



Smokin' Guns has six different shooting galleries to choose from, but the only ones that kept my attention for more than a round or two were Gangsterland and Silicon Gulch. In all of them except one (in County Fair, you simply hit as many targets as possible in two minutes), the goal is to pick off baddies while avoiding the innocent bystanders who seem blissfully unaware of the gun battle raging on all around them. Oh yeah, the bad guys eventually shoot back if you don't plug 'em first.

There are a lot of customizing options — in each gallery you can choose from six types of guns, adjust the speed of play, select automatic or manual reloading, and choose whether your weapon recoils after each shot — that make personalizing the game a snap. But that doesn't change the fact that the graphics look like something out of a kid's coloring book, or that the the action is repetitive and uninspiring. And if a shooter doesn't catch your eye or quicken your pulse, it's not likely to keep you coming back for more.

— Stephen Poole

METAL AND LACE: THE BATTLE OF THE ROBO BABES

Category: Fighting

Developer: Megatech

Publisher: Megatech, P.O. Box 11333, Torrance CA 90501

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386 or faster 640K RAM 15MB hard-drive space DOS 3.3 or higher	Sound Blaster or compatible sound card Mouse Joystick

Fighting games are finding a growing audience on the PC, and sexually charged software has always been popular. But a combination fighting/nudie game?!? Welcome to *Metal and Lace*, the new release from MegaTech.

Fighting games have never been famous for their strong plots, but this one is even weaker than most. The bottom line is this: beat the Robo Babes in combat, see the Robo Babes naked.

The fighting control in *Metal and Lace* is almost impossible to get used to, with some moves that just never seem to work. Graphics in the fighting scenes are equally disappointing; the grainy mechs jerk around the screen so spastically that the game sometimes becomes an exercise in just figuring out where your robot is, or which one you control. With all this going against you, winning

a match never seems to be an act of skill as much as a case of having more armament than the enemy. The only thing that'll keep most gamers playing is the reward you get for winning. And that's the one place *Metal and Lace* does excel.

After defeating one of your lovely foes, you can head back to the bar to relax and reload. Clicking on the picture of the girl posted in the center of the room will bring up a menu similar to the one used in choosing opponents. But this time, when you pick one of the Robo Babes you've beaten, you'll see her in a full-screen pin-up shot. After beating the girls in the first round, you'll see them fully clothed as they tell you a little something about themselves. Winning each subsequent round produces another pin-up, with the girls wearing a little less each time. If you opt to get the optional NR-17 disk, you'll eventually see the girls almost fully nude. In these scenes, the graphics and speech are very well-rendered—though the girl's dialogue is a little on the goofy side.

Metal and Lace won't appeal to most gamers. Action fans will find the fighting sequences graphically disappointing and difficult to control, and those looking for risque computer entertainment will be annoyed at having to finish the game levels to see the pin-ups. And of course, combining sex and violence so obviously is, at the very least, politically incorrect. As it is, the program is little more than a collection of well-drawn pictures packaged with a frustrating distraction.

— Trent C. Ward

CAPITOL HILL

Category: Political Simulation

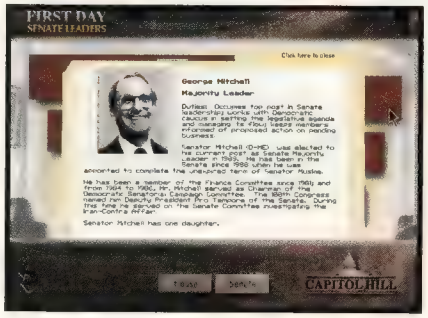
Developer: Amazing Media

Publisher: Software Toolworks, 60 Leveroni Court, Novato CA 94949

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386DX/33 MPC-compatible CD-ROM drive 1 MB RAM DOS 5.0 SVGA Sound Blaster, Pro Audio Spectrum, or compatible sound card Mouse	486DX/33 Double speed CD-ROM drive

So you think you can do a better job of running the government than those bums you elected? Then check out *Capitol Hill*, which lets you take on the role of a newly elected member



of the U.S. House of Representatives. *Capitol Hill* isn't a game, but it does provide a fascinating, highly informative look at life on the Hill and the inner workings of Congress.

After you're sworn in and meet the key leaders of Congress, you choose an office, hire a staff, and get down to work. Your office desk is where you'll perform most of your functions, and comes with all the tools necessary to perform your daily duties. Here you check your appointment calendar, review your budget, read letters from your constituents, and so forth.

The issues you're faced with, as well as the members of Congress, are real and current. You'll vote on issues like gun control, family leave, campaign reforms, and defense spending. It's nice that the officials and issues are real, but it does mean the program will become dated within a year or two.

Capitol Hill uses excellent audio narration, and House members appear in video clips to help introduce you to your new career. Other features include a multimedia tour of the Capitol building and an exhaustive overview of the legislative process.

Although you make a lot of decisions, many of your actions have no effect on the program. That's too bad, because the framework is here for a deep and rewarding Congressional simulation. I'd like to be able to attend some of those meetings on the calendar, answer some of those letters from voters, evaluate the true impact of my voting decisions, and see my Congressional career progress over time and. And, just once, I'd like the president to take my phone call.

Capitol Hill includes a game in which you answer a series of tough questions in order to become elected Speaker of the House. It's a simple dice game, but a pretty fair knowledge of Congress is necessary to win.

Capitol Hill provides an excellent look at the legislative system, and, for the political animals among us, is actually fun to explore. The program is an outstanding introduction to Congress, but after becoming acquainted with it I'd really like to be able to do more.

— Lee Buchanan

JOE AND MAC CAVEMAN NINJA

Category: Arcade

Developer: Elite

Publisher: New World Computing, P.O. Box 4302, Hollywood, CA 90078121.

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/10 MHz or better 1 MB	

"Don't mess with success." "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Principles such as these seem to be the guiding force in the entertainment industry, with video-game makers being no exception. The result? A lot of "me too" games — a phrase that describes *Joe and Mac Caveman Ninja* to a T.

The PC version looks and plays pretty much identical to the Genesis and Super Nintendo versions, at least on a fairly fast machine. As far as the storyline for *Joe and Mac* goes, you've seen this picture before. Joe and Mac are peaceful prehistoric guys. Primitive life is great until some neigborhood neanderthals raid their village and make off with our heroes' cavewomen. Joe and Mac must then battle beasties and the primal elements (even the fauna is deadly) to find the thugs who stole their cavegirls.

The action in *Joe and Mac* is also run-of-the-mill, though at least there's both vertical and horizontal scrolling. You've got several weapons at your disposal, including axes, flints, and boomerangs. One of the more exotic weapons is a ghostly image of Joe (or Mac) which attacks targets with much force. Each level of play has a boss, with higher levels adding bosses as you go. Traditional power-ups, one-ups, and food to sustain energy are also included.

The grapics are adequate, with plenty of color and some great earth tremors when you're under attack. Joe's eyes pop out in an appropriate display of fear when he encounters the bosses, and there's a funny animated electrocution whenever you touch water (I would think cavemen *liked* water!).

It doesn't seem like Elite has gone out of its way to take advantage of either the graphic or aural power at the disposal of most PC gamers, but it's probably just as well for this type of game. One major drawback: no password to save your progress made. Three continues, and back to the start of the game.

If you've got kids, *Joe and Mac* might be a good way to acquaint them with playing on a PC; if not, you'll probably want to save your dough for something a little more creative. It's not a bad game — but there's definitely nothing special about it either.

— Michael C. Poole

THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

Category: Electronic Book

Developer: Broderbund

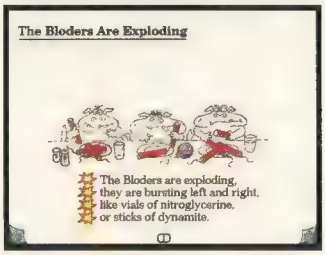
Publisher: Broderbund, 500 Redwood Blvd., Novato CA 94948-6121.

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/20 MHz with 4MB RAM CD-ROM drive, hard drive Windows 3.1 and DOS 3.3 or higher SVGA Sound Blaster, SB Pro, and compatibles	486SX/25 MHz or faster

Our experience of poetry is often enriched by hearing the words read aloud. The expressiveness and cadence of the reader convey meaning that's sometimes hard to grasp on the printed page, especially for children.

Fourth in Broderbund's Living Books series, *The New Kid on the Block* features 17 poems by Jack Prelutsky. The author and several other people read the poems aloud, injecting them with humor and rhythm. Each poem is also accompanied by a simple animation with splashes of color and sound effects. The text of each poem is included onscreen, and as the reader recites the lines, a yellow highlight shows which words are being read. In this way, the program helps children learn to read.


The Bloders Are Exploding
The Bloders are exploding,
they are bursting left and right,
like vials of nitroglycerine,
or sticks of dynamite.

After listening to the poem, kids can click on words and phrases to hear them again. Along with the spoken words, kids also see short animations related to the phrase. For example, in the poem "My Brother's Head Should be Replaced," a child could click on the word "replaced" and see the character's head fly off his shoulders, replaced by several other possibilities including the head of Frankenstein's monster. Illustrating the relationship between the text, the spoken words, and the images will surely reinforce reading skills and help kids build their vocabularies.

But don't buy this program solely to help a child improve his or her reading skills: Buy it to help a child learn to appreciate poetry. By virtue of its engaging presentation, *The New Kid on the Block* makes poetry fun. The program shows how to read poetry with a flexible imagination and how to visualize what the words are illustrating.

The only real shortcoming of the program is that it's not as easy to explore as it could be. Each stanza of a poem is presented on its own screen, and as kids move from one screen to the next, the program reads the whole stanza before freeing up the screen for exploration. It would be nice if you could disable the read-aloud feature so kids could move through an entire poem — stanza by stanza, screen by screen — at their own pace.

But this doesn't detract from the overall quality of *The New Kid on the Block*. The poems are clever and entertaining, with a wonderful cadence to accompany their humor. The presentation is beautiful in its simplicity and friendliness. And the mission of the program is admirable. If you can teach children to use their "inner eyes" as they read poetry, they'll be able to enjoy this kind of reading for the rest of their lives.

— Heidi Aycock

SUPER SOLVERS: GIZMOS AND GADGETS

Category: Educational

Developer: The Learning Company

Publisher: The Learning Company, 6493 Kaiser Drive, Fremont CA 94555

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/10 MHz or better 640K RAM 2.1 MB Hard-drive space DOS 3.3 or higher VGA Mouse	386SX/16 MHz Sound Blaster and compatible sound cards

Leave it to veteran educational-software publisher The Learning Company to take science — the subject most kids find boring — and make it fun and vibrant.

Morty Maxwell, the ubiquitous villain/star of all the Super Solver games, has taken over the Shady Glen Technology Center, claiming he can build the fastest and most efficient automobiles, aircraft, and alternative-energy vehicles. But you gotta hand it to Morty — at least he's giving kids a chance to prove him wrong by building faster vehicles than him.

Players begin by picking one of the three types of vehicles they want to build, then check out a blueprint for the specific object they're going to build. Pick alternative energy, for example, and the first vehicle you'll construct is an enclosed pedal-powered racer. Click on the wheels in the blueprint, and you learn that the bigger the wheel, the faster the top speed; click on the body, and you learn that an egg-shaped body is better than a rectangular one.

Morty's locked all the doors in the warehouses where the parts are stored, and answering science questions and solving puzzles is the only way to get inside and collect vehicle components. What's more, each warehouse is a simple maze, and players will have to use air jets, trampolines, and springboards to reach some doors. There's even an option to have chimps roaming the hallways, knocking you down and stealing your parts unless you feed them "knockout" bananas. All this gives *G&G* a nice arcade feel, and helps keep the game from becoming a scavenger hunt framed within a question-and-answer format.

After collecting all the necessary parts, it's on to the race course to see how you fare against Morty, with your vehicle's performance determined solely by the parts you selected. Win the race and you can either build another, more complex craft of the same type, or try one of the other two kinds of vehicles.

The questions and puzzles get progressively harder, and the vehicles become more complex. But there's no limit to how many times you can try a question or puzzle, nor are you penalized for losing a race — just head to the warehouse and look for better components.

G&G delivers that elusive combo of fun and learning that all educational software developers strive for. This one has what it takes to keep your kids coming back for more — and that's half the battle for learning games.

— Stephen Poole

NANOTANK

Category: Puzzle!

Developer: Twin Dolphin Software

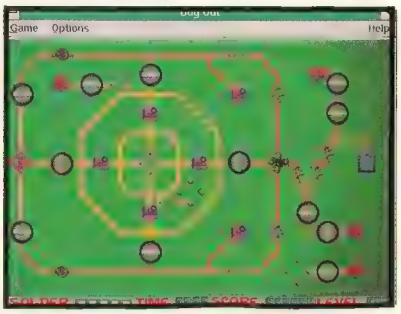
Publisher: Twin Dolphin Games, 220 Twin Dolphin Drive, Suite B, Redwood Shores CA 94065

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
Windows 3.1 386 DX/25 MHz 4MB RAM 9MB hard-drive space SVGA Mouse	Sound Blaster or compatible sound card.

Trapped inside an asteroid, the starship of a long-dead alien race waits. While researching the wreck, your archeological team unleashes a devastating computer virus on their own craft. And so, using the microscopic Nanotank, you must repair your computer's circuits and repel the virus before it destroys your ship and infects the networks of Earth. This is the world of *Nanotank*, Twin Dolphin's new puzzle game for Windows.

While the story may be complex, *Nanotank* is a very simple game to learn. You control a small tank which has the ability to manipulate circuits, and repair broken pathways. To move the tank, left-click on an adjacent circuit; right-clicking will manipulate the circuit you are on. Each of the different types of circuits performs a different function: changing the path of power flow, teleporting you across the screen, or even remotely controlling other components.



The controls are simple, but the game itself is not; in some cases, the mazes require pretty abstract thought. You'll use teleporters to move from one grid to another, and remote switches to change circuits that may be clear across the screen. Some of the lengthier puzzles in *Nanotank* will have your head swimming while you try to decide on the best approach to the problem. At these higher levels, careful timing and quick reasoning is necessary to keep the tank from being destroyed by trace bugs, short circuits, and lack of power.

Even though the graphics in *Nanotank* are nothing special, the crisp animation routines are fairly impressive. After clearing certain levels, these animations continue telling the story of the archaeological team and the insidious virus. Fast-paced music plays throughout the game, adding a sense of urgency to the puzzles.

It's nice to see a new approach to this type of title, but for all its extras, *Nanotank* is still just another puzzle game. Fans of other brain-teasers will probably like this one, but it's not a real blockbuster.

— Trent C. Ward

THE CASINO GAMBLER KIT

Category: Gambling Simulation

Developer: Villa Crespo

Publisher: Villa Crespo, 1725 McGovern Street, Highland Park IL 60035

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
IBM PC or compatibles 640K RAM 3 MB Hard-drive space DOS 3.0 or higher EGA	286/12 MHz or faster VGA Sound Blaster or compatible sound card Mouse

This title is actually five titles from Villa Crespo Coffee Break Series bundled in one package. Included in the kit are *Ruckus Poker*, *Dr. Thorp's Mini-Blackjack*, *Dr. Wong's Jacks+ Video Poker*, *Casino Craps* and *Ruckus Roulette*.

Most amusing of the lot was *Ruckus Poker*, a poker simulation with 5 Card Stud, Hold'em, 7 Card Stud, and Hi Chicago. The table hosts four players with a pool of eight computer opponents to choose from, all with different betting styles. Options let you change bet values, game

speed, and player thoughts. I always left the thoughts on, especially for Gramps ("Whew! Do I really smell that bad?"). The different playing styles add variety to the games, and the AI routines for computer opponents are very good — one guy even plays like me!

Dr. Thorp's Mini-Blackjack and *Dr. Wong's Jacks+ Video Poker* are abridged versions of *Edward O. Thorp's Real Blackjack* and *Stanford Wong's Video Poker*. *Mini-Blackjack* doesn't have *Real Blackjack*'s charts, full tutor, and strategy simulations, and as the title makes clear, *Jacks+ Video Poker* offers only one type of video poker machine. But these mini-versions still contain advice and stats, as well as options to customize house rules. (If you're a serious blackjack

player, though, check out Villa Crespo's original *Edward O. Thorp's Real Blackjack*.)

In *Casino Craps*, the key strokes to lay the many types of bets are clear and simple. Options let you change the odds and bet units or get help, but they don't allow for special exceptions on certain odds bets, like you'll find in real casinos.

Ruckus Roulette also employs a simple interface that works well, offering control over chip values, surrender options, and whether to use a European wheel or American wheel. An especially nice feature is the ability to simulate thousands of spins to test a pet system (though there really isn't one for roulette).

Though not high-end in terms of graphics and sound, all the games here are very playable, thanks to realistic options and smooth interfaces. If a better-looking casino game comes out for these basic games but doesn't have as many options, then it's probably not worth it.

— Joseph Novicki

READER RABBIT 3

Category: Education

Developer: The Learning Company

Publisher: The Learning Company, 6493 Kaiser Drive, Fremont CA 94555

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/10Mhz or better 640K DOS 3.3 or higher Hard drive VGA	386SX/16Mhz Sound Blaster or compatible sound card

Reader Rabbit has a new job. He's working for *The Daily Skywriter* and learning the ropes of hard-boiled journalism — or as hard-boiled as it can get in an idyllic town like Wordville.

Part of a series of programs from The Learning Company, *Reader Rabbit 3* continues the fine tradition of teaching kids to read and write — focusing, in this installment, on the parts of a sentence.

Like the rest of the *Reader Rabbit* series, *RR3* is packed with charming characters and interesting settings — chipmunks tapping away busily at their keyboards in the newsroom, Basset hounds passing on hot

tips through the Clue Hound Decoder, work-at-home mother mole previewing movies in her living room, and a gruff bear editor popping out of his office to bark corrections and praise at our hero.

Reader Rabbit 3 teaches sentence structure by emphasizing the basics that make up every good news story — Who, What, When, Where, How, and (if possible) Why. Using this concept, the game creates exercises that show how phrases convey this kind of information. Each exercise builds logically on the preceding one, and skills are developed in an entertaining way. The exercises *are* challenging, but there's plenty of encouraging feedback.

The theme is also of particular merit. Writing news stories is a great way to learn how language communicates information — not only because it's systematic, but also because it's more concrete than focusing on such terms as direct object, adverbial phrase, and so on.

Although the program works exceptionally well, there is one big shortcoming. *Reader Rabbit 3* is fairly rigid in how it checks a child's answers, and in some cases this can be very frustrating. For example, in Clue Hounds, children are asked to identify the Who/What part of the following sentence: "The Wordville School held a fair on Saturday." Although the program will only accept the phrase "The Wordville School," "a fair" also fits the Who/What requirement. The fact that the program's designers want kids to include "a fair" with the Did What phrase "held a fair" doesn't change the fact that either answer could be correct.

This problem isn't difficult to solve if adults are available — and able — to talk about it when it arises. Nor does it cast much of a shadow on the overall excellence of the program. And if it lights a fire under any young Woodwards or Bernsteins, The Learning Company should be doubly praised.

— Heidi Aycock

Goodbye PC Entertainment... Hello PC GAMER

Introducing PC Gamer...

Yep, that's right. As you've probably gathered from the Editor's Notes — not to mention that 3-page ad in the middle of this issue — there are big changes going on here at *PC Entertainment*. So big, in fact, that we're changing the name of the book to *PC Gamer*. The new title is shorter, easier to remember, and it says what we're all about: Games.

You probably know what most of those changes are already. But here, at the risk of ramming it home one time too many, is a brief rundown of the most important changes:

• We're going monthly
You'll only have to wait four weeks between issues! And more than that, you'll get reviews of all the latest games a lot faster than we've been able to deliver them in the past. Look for our reviews to hit the newsstands around the same time as the new games hit the store shelves — and don't buy another title until you've read *PC Gamer*!

• We're getting bigger
Expect each new issue of *PC Gamer* to be a lot heftier than the mag you're reading now, with more reviews, news, tips, features, and full previews of the hottest upcoming games.

• A monthly cover disk
With every issue of *PC Gamer*, you'll get a 3.5" high-density disk packed with great, playable previews of the best new games. We're no longer just a magazine — we're a complete interactive experience!

• A hot new look You love PC games. They're exciting, they're cutting-edge, and they look better than ever. Your favorite games magazine should reflect these qualities — and *PC Gamer* will.

Phew, huh? Those are the main changes, but that really just scratches the surface. We'll be bringing you plenty of new departments, and new opportunities for our expert editors to let you know what's going on in the game industry.

But don't worry — we won't be tossing the baby out with the bathwater. All the good stuff you love about *PC Entertainment* -- like the fact that it's aimed at adults, and *serious* gamers —is going to stay put. After all, the same gang will be doing the new magazine. But now, we'll be able to bring you a lot more of what you want.

You can bet that *PC Gamer* will be the *only* games mag you'll need. And if you loved *PC Entertainment*, you're gonna go nuts over *PC Gamer*. It'll be the best book money can buy.

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PC Gamer premieres across the nation starting April 26. Issue 2 will go on sale June 7, and then every month after that.

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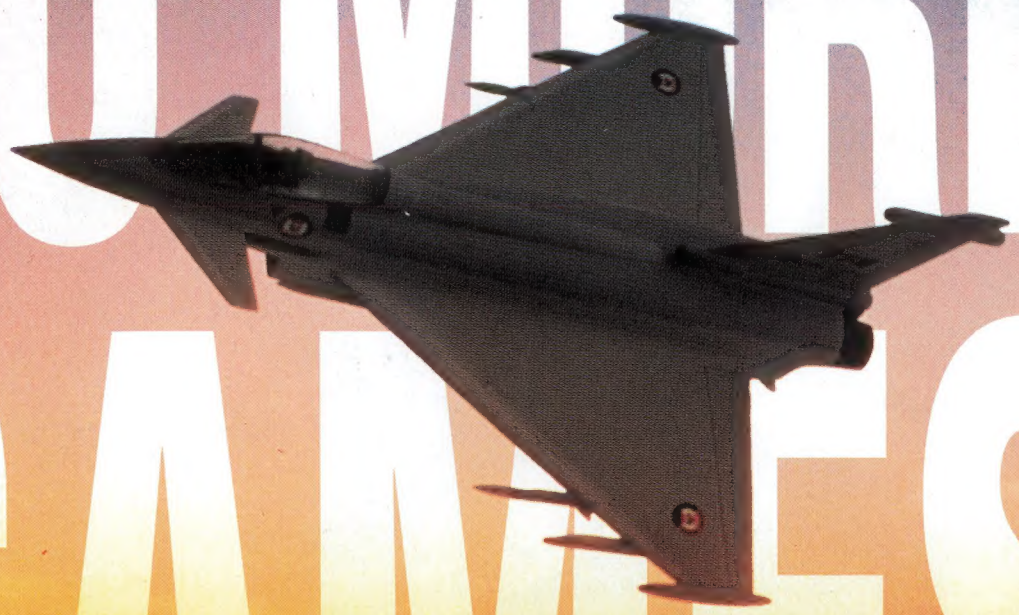

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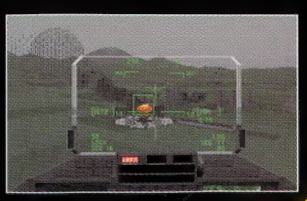

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